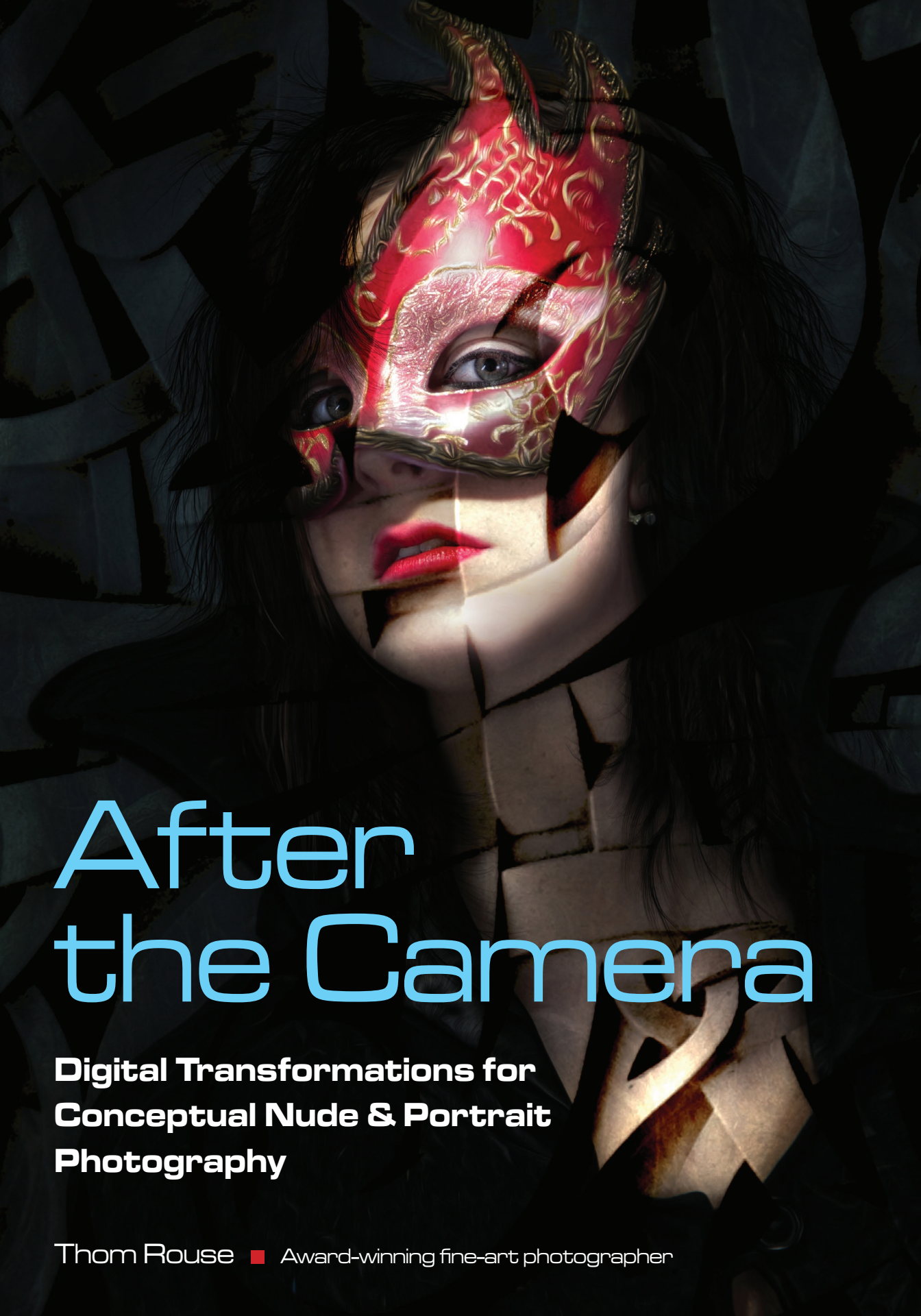

After the Camera

Digital Transformations for Conceptual Nude & Portrait Photography

Thom Rouse ■ Award-winning fine-art photographer

To my wife Jeanne, who is in every way responsible
for my career. I hope someday she can forgive herself.

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About the Author

Thom Rouse (M. Photog. MEI, CR, CPP, F-ASP) began his career as a portrait and wedding photographer in 1994. Based near Chicago, he now divides his time between commercial, fine art, and commissioned fine art images with his clients as the central subject of his pieces. His conceptual fine art images utilize real world photographs blended and manipulated to create an alternative to real world perception. Thom also lectures and teaches workshops on topics ranging from Photoshop as an artist's tool to visual literacy to and lighting and posing for figure studies.

Thom holds the PPA Master of Photography degree, the Award of Excellence, the Master of Electronic Imaging degree, and the Photographic Craftsman degree. He is a Fellow in the American Society of Photographers and a member of XXV. He has 54 PPA Loan Collection images and has won the ASP Gold Medallion twice. He has received five Diamond, four Platinum and one Gold Photographer of the Year Awards. He has received the Kodak Elite Award and the Canon Par Excellence Select Award, as well as numerous Kodak Gallery and Fuji

Masterpiece Awards. Thom's work has been exhibited throughout the United States as well as Canada, China, Japan, Korea, and Europe.

To learn more, visitwww.thomrouse.com or contact him at thom@thomrouse.com.

1 Infinite Turtle Theory

Infinite Turtle Theory is an image for which the title came first and the visual concept later. I have a number of such images, and I keep lists of titles that I review when I'm stuck for inspiration. It seems that many visual artists have taken inspiration from writers, while at the same time many writers have taken inspiration from visual art. The Greeks called it *ekphrasis*; the description of one art form by another through words. But we make images because for some things there are no words.

The origin of The Infinite Turtle Theory is uncertain, but it has been used as a metaphor in many philosophical and scientific discussions with a variety of meanings. The base of the image has a turtle, on top of a turtle, on top of another turtle and implies that it's "turtles all the way down" as it is stated in many of the stories of the Infinite Turtle Theory.

The central subject in a vintage dress has her right palm raised toward heaven, and her left palm turned toward Earth in the tradition of Sufi dancers. In the background are subtle images of an angel and of Buddha. The many symbols resonate differently with individual viewers of the image, which is completely intentional. We seek to create an experience for the audience of our images, and using widely known symbols is an effective way to elicit a viewer's experience with an image.

The central subject was photographed on a medium gray background *(see bottom left of finished image)* allowing a variety of textures and objects to show well in various layer blending modes. The model stood with one foot on each of two stools that were removed in postproduction and replaced with images of ceramic garden turtles. No turtles were harmed in the making of this image.

➤ Straight out of camera

➤ Several of numerous incorporated elements

➤ *The Infinite Turtle Theory*, finished image

2 Wild Ride

The image *Wild Ride* was composed using three images taken from wildly different places and circumstances. One of features I love about Photoshop as a fine art medium is the opportunity to use images without regard to the time and place of their origin. In my work, an image from a decade or more ago, and from thousands of miles away, might be paired with something from a session yesterday just down the street. Photoshop is an opportunity to create an alternative history with photography.

Each component of the image was captured in a separate place and time. *Wild Ride* was composed from an image of a park in an eastern residential area of Venice. The model, Anne Duffy, was a traveling model touring the US from Australia. Anne was photographed by window light in the studio with the pose just as it is seen in the final image.

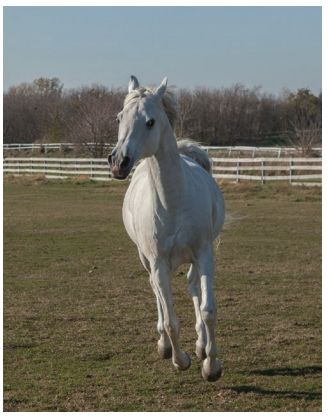
The horse, Safeen, was a beautiful Arabian owned by a photographer friend. Safeen was photographed with his owner, Kerri, at a nearby stable. The late Safeen was a beautiful horse who loved to perform for the camera. Kerri simply released Safeen into the corral, and he began showing off and performing, always keeping an eye on us to make sure we were watching.

Like many of my images, *Wild Ride* was conceived of while touring the contents of my hard drives and letting the concepts from various images bump into each other and commingle in my imagination. The technical work was simply to select and composite the images together, but the image was the product of imagination not technique. I think we are wise to remember that technique is in service to our creativity and not its source. It's the very fact of having nothing in mind whatsoever, that has made this technique of randomly searching hard drives work for me.

➤ *Wild Ride*, finished image

➤ A park in Venice

➤ Model Anne Duffy, studio capture



➤ A Safeen, an Arabian horse

3 Firebird

Su Miller is a model and costume designer who has designed and created everything from her own wedding dress to historically accurate reenactment costumes to, in this case, a firebird ensemble created entirely from her own imagination. Su was photographed by window light in the studio against a painted background and the location is from the floor of Death Valley. With a single texture layer over the top of the figure and the background, there is no manipulation of the image other than masking the three layers into each other.

Knowing when to stop working on an image and determine it as finished is perhaps even more important and difficult than knowing where to start. When we begin crafting an image, there are almost infinite possibilities and nearly as many opportunities to reach dead ends and retreat to an earlier stage of development. By definition there is only one *finish* for the image, and it requires one final choice from among the many possibilities. Because we have so many tools available to us in digital image-making, the options are over-

➤ *Firebird,* finished image

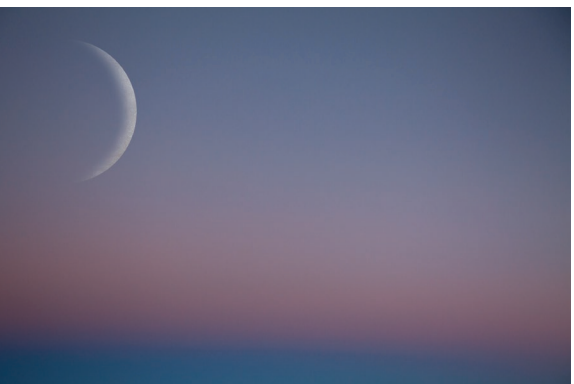
◀ The studio capture *(top)*

◀ Death Valley *(bottom)*

whelming, but creativity thrives on rules and limitations.

We must have rules, and the most important rules are the rules that we make for ourselves. My most important two rules are that all of my images are photographic in origin, regardless of how much I may manipulate them, and that I must personally capture each photograph in the image. Furthermore, in every image I try to create something I've never seen before and include it with something that is entirely familiar to me and to others. The choice of one's rules doesn't have to be permanent, but we should not change our rules casually and without careful consideration. Rules are the anchor points for our style.

Shhh-



When you vary from what others assume is your style, regular viewers of your work may become confused, concerned and may even reject your work. But we must push our own boundaries even when, or perhaps especially when, we're asked to do what is familiar. Sometimes we need to look in the spaces between our thoughts and work with what we see there. We can't always worry about whether it's good or whether others will like it. Self-judgment is the enemy of creation.

It appears that the female figure in the foreground is the central subject of this image. But for me, the concept of the image is an opportunity to use the image *Jet Fish* from another project. I greatly enjoyed photographing the very attractive Kristi, and I thank her for her help in drawing attention to my fish. Kristi was photographed in a friend's studio with traditional techniques and lighting. The only digital manipulation was to

➤ *Shhh-*, finished image

➤ A studio capture *(top)*

➤ Jet fish construction *(middle)*

➤ Backgound image *(bottom)*

use the Liquify filter to pull the black fabric across the bottom of the frame as a leading line. The jet fish were assembled from my often used ornamental wooden fish, some goose wings, and elements from a jet aircraft I'd captured specifically for this previsualized concept. On a large scale print, the viewer is able to see head-and-shoulders views of fish in each of the jet fish's passenger windows.

What an image means is not important. Meaning is something written in words. We strive to create images, both photo-real or abstract, that offer the viewer an experience and emotional response. Just as a melody has no meaning, an image has no meaning; we either like it or we don't. As an image maker, I want to show you something you haven't seen before.

5 Andromeda

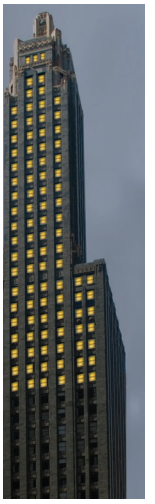
Andromeda was the greek goddess, daughter of Cassiopeia. To be honest, the only aspect of the image that particularly illustrates Andromeda is the beauty and grace of the model Amelia. My underlying reason for the image is to indulge in two of my major inspirations: the paintings of Gustav Klimt and the Carbide Carbon building in Chicago.

An example of Art Deco architecture, the Carbon Carbide Building is difficult to capture from a single point of view. In *Andromeda*, the building appears as a vertical element on each side of the subject. To utilize the building as a day-for-night exposure, I developed a greatly underexposed RAW file. On several layers, I, somewhat painstakingly, created each glowing window individually by masking an overdeveloped file of the building. The building and window-light layers are integrated with a texture layer in Soft Light blending mode to build local contrast, a technique that sometimes results in loss of shadow detail. In such cases, shadow detail can be recovered by using the Blend sliders under the Blending Options tab of the Layer Style dialog box.

The Klimt influence is most evident in the golden color palette and to some degree the composition. No one comes close to achieving Klimt's luminous results with the palette, but we cannot help but be inspired by his work. The danger in becoming inspired by great artists is that it can also inhibit us when we inevitably realize that our results may not exhibit the greatness of those who inspire us. But we have to remember that we make images to participate in a uniquely human endeavor and to make the images that only we can make. As Teddy Roosevelt said, "Comparison is the thief of joy."

▼ Straight out of camera

▼ The Carbon Carbide Building Chicago



▼ Enamel cooking pot texture for circle shape

▲ *Andromeda*, finished image

6 The Ones We Love

During a full day with models Megan and Jean-Luc in a beautiful Victorian home full of gorgeous antiques, my imagination tended toward its dark side. Not everyone is comfortable with this image, but I was pleased with its telling of an ambiguous but emotional and impactful story. Ambiguity in an image can encourage each viewer to create his or her own story. Did she die? Did he kill her? Are they the ghosts of the former residents? There's plenty of fodder to spin any number of tales in this image. When I sell an image there is a story perceived in the image that in some way resonates with the buyer. Although often people ask, I try never to tell any specific story about a piece and rob the buyer of their own story and, to be honest, risk losing the sale.

The image *The Ones We Love* was accomplished with only modest postproduction. Having an incredible location rich in detail can save a great deal of time in Photoshop. The stairs, stained glass, and pose were all photographed in a single exposure in camera just as they appear in the finished image. A few texture layers in various blending modes were used to supply the grunge and apparent blood stain and wounds on Megan's face.

The only compositing involved was to replace the image in the existing frame with an image of the subjects, taken earlier in the day in another room of the same location. I often replace the existing images from a location with my own images to support the concept or story. My idea of a dream commission would be the opportunity to photograph an elaborate location and then in reality replace all of the images displayed with my own images.

➤ Straight out of camera

➤ The replacement painting

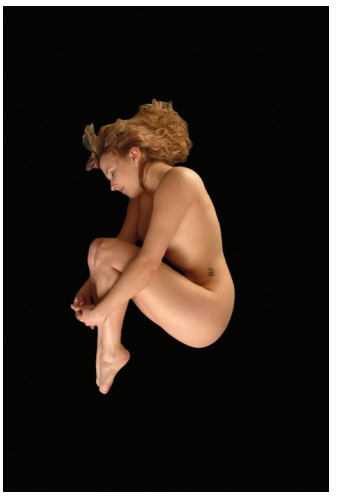
➤ Image within the replacement painting

▲ *The Ones We Love*, finished image

7 Dance Within

Despite its title, *Dance Within*, this image is about falling through space. "A body falling through space has no awareness of itself" is a line I've read somewhere—possibly in a book on physics—although I've never been able to find the phrase since. But it was my motivation for this image in which the large standing principal image of the subject dancing as she imagined herself falling through space. It was another of my very occasional uses of Corel Painter software and a large palette knife in the Clone Mode. It was also dependent on the model sharing the concept: she acted as much as modeled, visualizing herself falling and twisting though space like an Olympic high diver. In reality, she was patiently posing on and across a stool, while I shifted lights and varied camera angles. Like many successful images, the angle of capture was not always the angle of presentation and perception.

The individual images are captured with a pre-visualized sequence of the model posing across a stool that was later removed in Photoshop. Many images were taken with subtle differences in pose, expression, and camera angle. I am always happy to spend the time to edit my over-shooting habits in order to find just the right exposure. A fraction of a second difference between exposures and a minimal change in camera angle can make all the difference in the resulting image. The images were selected and arranged down the left side of the frame. The subject twists through space from a natal position in the top frame to a swan dive position in the bottom frame. Subtle frames were placed around each of the images to add a sense of time and space in deference to my original inspiration from a physics text.



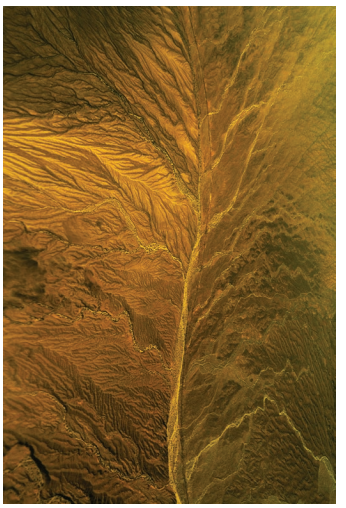
▲ ➤ Various poses simulating a body falling through space

▲ *Dance Within*, finished image

8 Electra

Model Kat provided this pose almost immediately after we began our session. Although we continued for several hours and many hundreds of exposures, this was the pose for the image *Electra*. Collaborating with a model and encouraging improvisation in posing yields results that a photographer would not have achieved by being overly directive. On the other hand, the photographer should not abandon all control and direction of the concept. The chemistry between models and photographers varies greatly, and in some cases a wonderful fluid rhythm develops during a session with an almost wordless communication and fluid shift between poses.

The concept for *Electra* was not overly specific or previsualized, nor was it titled in advance. I knew that I wanted to work with Kat and use red sheer fabric and a blindfold. Without a specific plan I often find inspiration and direction by deciding on just a few specific details before starting a session and improvising all the other aspects. In this case, an improvisational collaboration between me and the model resulted in a finished image, completed with very little postproduction. The pose was captured one hundred percent in camera, with all credit owing to the look and posing skill of the model. A single texture, a high altitude aerial from a commercial flight, was added over the subject layer in the Difference blending mode, resulting in a very significant change in color from the original capture. The new color and the sense of an electric charge created by the texture led me to the perception of *Electra*. Sometimes, I start with a detailed concept; in other cases, by improvising with a few minimal details, I let the concept develop from the process of playing without expectation.



➤ *Electra,* finished image

➤ Straight out of camera *(left)*

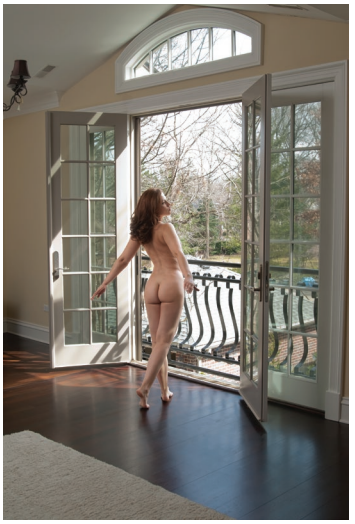
➤ Manipulated texture from a high-altitude aerial image *(right)*

9 Angelic

Model Arabella, with whom I've worked on many occasions, had been working on a new line of skin care products, and I was happy to assist her with images for her product line named Angel. A number of images were created using a mutual friend's house as a location, and this is among my favorites from that session. As is said elsewhere, Arabella is not always easy to work with, but we've always achieved results that we've both liked. (And perhaps it is me who is not easy to work with.)

Location inspires me, and this particular location has yielded many images. The French doors look out to the east from the second floor where we shot on a morning with full sun. Two White Lightning mono lights were bounced off the white ceiling from camera left behind the model. The added artificial light was sufficient to balance the sunshine yet preserve the look of raw sunlight streaming through the French doors. The camera was on a tripod to hold the verticals absolutely straight on the frame. Although it's relatively easy to repair perspective with Free Transform, it would also distort the subject.

The diaphanous wings are those of a real goose that I'd photographed years ago that have appeared in many images. The nude Arabella struck a pose in the window, and I began to shoot. (A neighbor was perhaps surprised but did not object.) Arabella quickly retreated from the window but not before I was confident I had the shot. The clouds were added from personal stock and a good deal of time was spent masking them out of the door and window frames. Several textures were added over the top in various blending modes and were masked back selectively to achieve the final result.



➤ Straight out of camera with no adjustments *(left)*

➤ Intermediary step in postproduction *(right)*

➤ *Angelic*, finished image

10 Country Girl Dream

The inspiration for the image *Country Girl Dream* was from a dream my friend Debra Sportel had about flying over a pig pen on a magic carpet. Although the pig-pen visual did not appeal to me, I took the underlying idea and romanced it with a corn-field as background, a white vintage dress, and a pair of crows with pink ribbons to pull her across the landscape. Neither of us was especially enthusiastic about the image.

When I presented the image to others, however, the almost universal response was that it was an allegory for "the journey" of breast cancer. For many, viewing the image evoked great emotion; all of us will at some time be touched by the disease. Until it was brought to our attention, the identification of the pink ribbons with breast cancer awareness had never occurred to either of us. I was happy to have the image used by several breast cancer support groups, but the sad and emotional irony is that Debra was diagnosed with breast cancer less than a year after the completion of the image.

I'm very pleased to report that it has been several years since Debra completed treatment and her cancer is now in the past. When we present our images publicly we have no idea of the personal context and history that impacts each individual viewer's experience of the image.

The image of Debra was photographed full length as Debra stood and posed verti-

➤ Straight out of camera

➤ Postprocduction in progress

cally. I photographed her feet on point individually as well as her very long black hair hanging off the side of her head and later reattached the feet and hair in the horizontally oriented pose. The sky, ribbons, cornfield and clouds were all photographed separately and composited in Photoshop.

▲ *Country Girl Dream*, finished image

11 Snapshot of a Dream

I've explained that my friend, artist Debra Sportel had been diagnosed with breast cancer sometime after the image, *Country Girl Dream,* had been finished. Deb is also the subject of this image *Snapshot of a Dream* created during the course of her chemotherapy and after the loss of her very long and lovely dark hair, pictured in *Country Girl Dream*. This image is about the various emotional states Deb experienced during her treatment: the prayerful Deb, scared Deb, as well as the angry, accepting, and determined Debras. She also had completed a number of her own very powerful self-portraits during her treatment. Personal history, including the maker and subject's personal histories is important to the image making process, and eventually viewers bring themselves into their experience of the image.

Four principal images of Debra are depicted, the three clustered together in the upper right quadrant, and a supplicating figure at bottom left. As the three upper figures interact with each other, a trace of small particles drifts down toward the supplicant (or up toward the trio). There are additional, very subtle images of Deb only faintly visible around the image; some appear blissful, some anguished.

The lighting allowed for spontaneity of the subject. Two 48-inch strip lights were placed opposite each other about twelve feet apart, right and left, facing the subject at ninety degrees to the camera. A single fill light was placed well behind and above the camera. The subject was allowed significant spontaneity of direction and movement in an approximately four-foot square area without requiring any changes to the lighting pattern. The selected subject images were positioned over the background with additional elements. Finally, a number of textures were layered over the image and masked into selected areas.

- The background from a prior project *(left)*
- Subject's image straight out of camera *(middle)*
- Subject's image straight out of camera, lower left of finished image *(right)*
- *Snapshot of a Dream,* finished image

12 Masked Dance

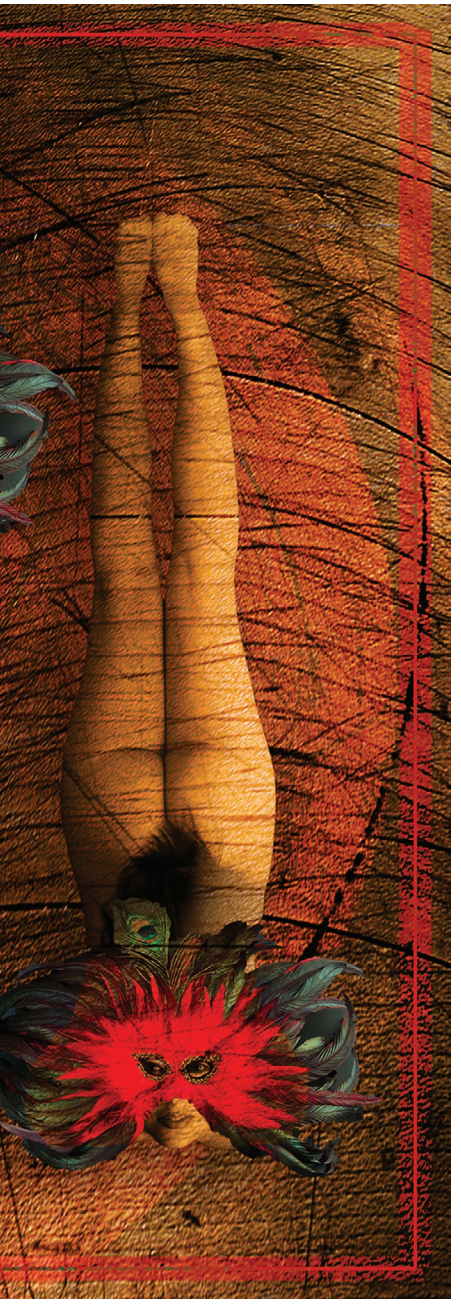
The image *Masked Dance* is the result of my capture of too many great poses in one session and trying to utilize them all in one image. This model loves to pose for figure studies, but did not want it known to her friends, family, or employer; her participation was provided only on the condition that she would not be recognizable.

The series of poses was captured in a very brief session, and all were down shots from a loft above the camera room. A dark

▼ *Masked Dance*, finished image

gray muslin was stretched across the floor to provide good contrast for selecting the figures in Photoshop without creating a color cast on the model's skin from use of a blue or green screen. Lighting was from a 48x12-inch strip light lying on the floor horizontally to camera right, with fill light from an umbrella above. The subject lay on the floor for a period of not more than ten minutes, and improvised a new pose after each click of the shutter. As a result of her speed-posing session, I had well over one hundred poses to choose from and all were captured in less than ten minutes.

The carnival mask was photographed after the final poses were identified to insure that angle and lighting would be appropriate, and then added in postproduction. The figures were given a painterly quality by using several passes with the Reduce Noise filter (Filter>Noise>Reduce Noise) with the Strength and Reduce Color adjustment sliders at full strength by pulling them all the way to the right, and the Preserve Details and Sharpen Details adjustment sliders pulled all the way to the left in the zero percent position. Finally a texture overlay of a wooden cutting board was added with some detail masked back in the figures.



➤ One of many studio poses *(top right)*

➤ Primary texture *(bottom right)*

13 Balancing Act

As an agency-represented model, Amelia could probably be regularly seen in print advertising for which she is paid a great deal more than I can afford. Yet she has regularly collaborated on my projects for little or no compensation, and I am grateful. Amelia is incredible and has contributed to our collaborations in ways I could never have imagined on my own.

For this image, *Balancing Act*, Amelia stood on a small stool, allowing the antique kimono to hang straight down without touching the floor. She stayed in the pose as precisely as possible, with right palm up and left palm down. The kimono was removed by an assistant and exposures were made of her nude figure beneath. Kudos to the model who can stand motionless, with her arms outstretched for that long without moving; It could not have been easy. The clothed file was layered over the nude file, and a subtle impression of the nude form was revealed via a layer mask by using repeated low opacity brush strokes with a black brush.

The two small spheres, right and left, were added in Photoshop as well as a number of textures, both in front of and behind the subject. With no makeup artist on the set, I undertook spiking Amelia's hair with gel. (She has since forgiven me.) The implied yin/yang exposure of her face was achieved through careful painting and masking back in of features using Photoshop. Finally, the camera right-half of the Kimono was toned in blue—the complementary color of the left half. This augments the yin/yang theme. I love using symmetry in images, but I often try for an imperfect symmetry with some dialog of difference between the two otherwise similar halves of the image.

➤ *Balancing Act,* finished image

➤ Straight out of camera

➤ Postproduction in progress

➤ Texture

14 Twisted Sister

Despite the glib title, the creation of the image *Twisted Sister* was a significant advance in my technical process. Although the completed image is somewhat complex, the entire image is the result of duplicating a single element—a torso—with a single texture. I'd been inspired to use a musical concept to construct the finished image. In music theory, a canon is a piece of music created from a single melody that is repeated over itself at some regular interval. In its simplest form, it is singing in the round, as is often performed with the song *Row Row Row Your Boat,* and in its more

▼ *Twisted Sister,* finished image

complex form, often is applied to many of Bach's most well-known compositions.

In my canon-inspired visualization, the single manipulated photograph of a torso is re-sized and repeated on individual layers throughout the final image, resulting in a far more complex composition than the original single image. Each of the individual torso layers has been given both Bevel & Emboss and Drop Shadow layer styles. The Use Global Light option in both the Drop Shadow and Bevel & Emboss dialog windows was unchecked allowing each layer to retain its individual direction of light. A layer mask was used to blend each of the torsos into the layer beneath. Under the Blending Option tab in the layer style dialog box, the Layer Mask Hide Effects option was checked so that layers masks could be used to blend both the pixel content and layer style of the masked layers.

This image illustrates, as does much of my work, the use of Photoshop as a medium for the creation of an original image and not solely as a method for enhancing and repairing existing photographs. I think of Photoshop as a visual medium in itself as well as a production tool for the enhancement of photographs.

- Torso, numerously duplicated in finished image *(top)*
- Image of leaf used to texture finished image *(bottom)*

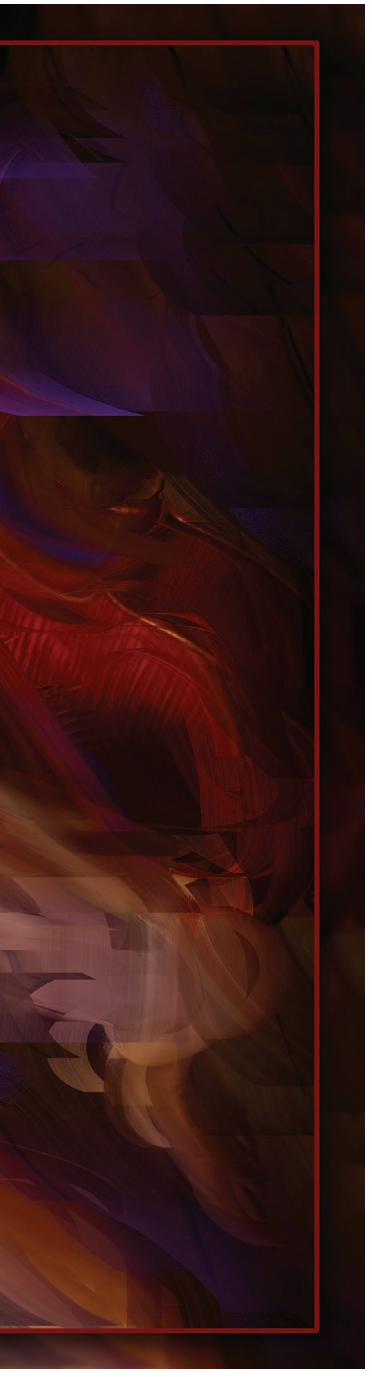
15 Portrait in B Minor

The violin, and stringed instruments in general, is so feminine in form that using it as a prop in celebrations of femininity is irresistible. In this case, the subject of the image not only played the instruments in the image, she was from a family of luthiers who also made and repaired the instruments.

▼ *Portrait in B Minor,* finished image

The capture was straightforward with the subject on the floor and the instruments posed around her. A 48-inch strip light was laid horizontally on the floor low in the frame to camera left, and a white foamcore reflector to the top right of the frame.

I appreciate Corel Painter software, and I've seen stellar creations using the program, but I don't have the affinity with Painter that I do with Photoshop. In the case of this image, I defaulted to the largest palette knife available and exaggerated the contours of the composition. I have used a similar technique with other images, and although I know that Painter is a very deep and extensive program, it is the only approach that I have used regularly.



The final steps in postproduction were accomplished in Photoshop. The brush strokes were selectively softened with a Gaussian Blur filter, and as a final step I used a technique I use in many images to build local contrast. I either flatten the image, or I create a composite layer on the top of the layer stack by activating the top most visible layer and pressing the shortcut Shift, Alt, Command, and E keys (for PC: Ctrl, Alt, Shift-E) thereby creating a composite layer of all the layers without having to flatten the initial layers in the image. The composite layer is converted to black & white and the Soft Light blending mode is selected, resulting in the enhancement of local contrast within the image.

▲ Straight out of camera

▲ Detail of finished image

16 Cubist Blue Spirit

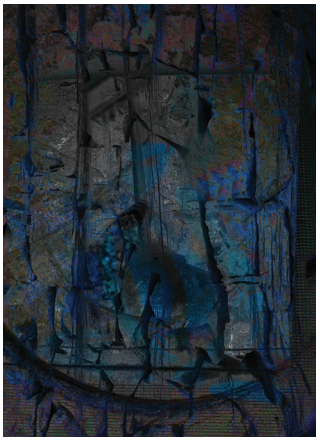
The image *Cubist Blue Spirit* incorporates the first use of a technique that I've since used in many images. The technique employs repeated selections of an underlying image, each placed on its own layer to reconstruct a new stylized image of the original underlying image. The model, Betcee, spontaneously fell into the pose while waiting for me to meter lights. In many cases, as it turns out, the hero pose is a pose spontaneously chosen by a subject while waiting for me to get my ducks in a row. It has come to be part of my regular process. I keep busy with tasks such as adjusting props, backgrounds, or lighting until the subject assumes a comfortable, natural pose without the self-conscious and affected look of an intentional pose.

As Betcee hugged her ankle with her head on her knee waiting for me, I saw the pose and whirled around to get the shot. But I had startled her and she raised her head with an intense look, resulting in a unforeseen and unplanned capture. Despite the extensive postproduction work in creating the image, I continue to think it was her part-startled, part-curious expression that made the image a success.

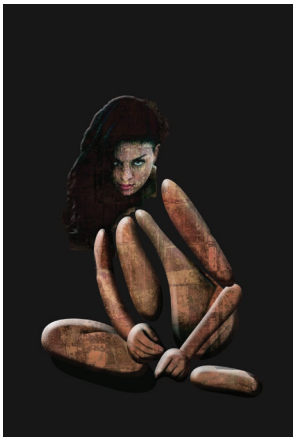
Postproduction involved selecting the entire subject and applying multiple texture layers yielding both the texture and color manipulations. Then, a series of individual selections of the hands, feet, forearm, thigh, and so on was made. I put these selections on their own layers using a low opacity Bevel & Emboss layer style. This was an early image using this technique. In later images the technique was expanded, and I used it in more complex ways, but the fundamental technique has remained the same.

➤ *Cubist Blue Spirit,* finished image

➤ The underlying original pose



➤ The background



➤ The selections during postproduction in progresss

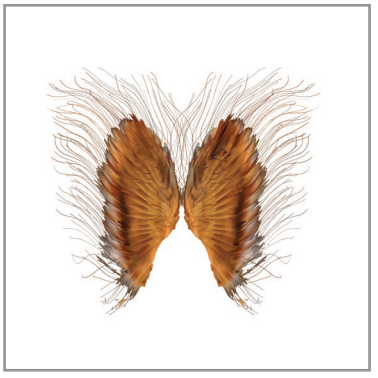
17 Mirage

Death Valley is both an awe-inspiring and image-inspiring environment. It feels entirely alien, and I can't help but imagine things out of the ordinary when I'm there. The model, Christa, was photographed in the studio wearing the wardrobe seen in the image *Mirage*, and I had no specific plan for where the image was ultimately going. But when I stumbled into a folder of Death Valley scenes, the entire finished image came to mind. I remain convinced that the craft and completion of an image demands concentration, but distraction often contributes to the creativity.

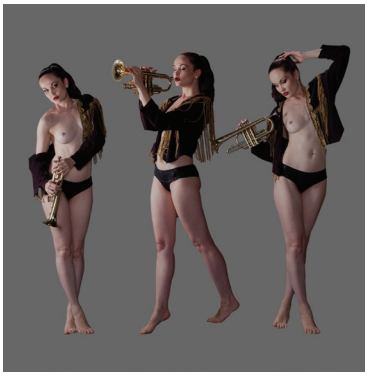
The most difficult aspect of the image was in finding the stylized wings that I'd remembered starting but never utilized in a finished image. I located them, but not until I'd stumbled across the trio of horn players that I'd created for an entirely different image. I have some motifs that have been utilized repeatedly, but always in a completely different context within each image. Once I'd located the component photographs, the finished image fell into place quickly.

The Liquify filter was used to modify the landscape, creating a soft curve from left to right in the valley floor, and to alter the fabric in Christa's dress to give a sense of the dress emanating from the landscape itself. The previously assembled horn players were brought in to herald the arrival of the central subject. Finally, the subjects' outstretched hands begged to have apples to juggle in a setting where no apples have ever grown.

Successful photojournalism for Henri Cartier-Bresson was to capture the decisive moment. Digital photographic image-making allows us to edit a single moment, and assemble another entirely fictional moment using a number of instances, places, and things.



▲ Wings from an earlier project



▲ Horn players from an earlier project

▲ The studio shot

▲ *Mirage*, finished image

18 Escape Velocity

I am organizationally challenged, and locating the image that I suddenly realize is precisely what I need as an element for a current project is not an easy task. But the task of looking for the right image file has become a part of my creative process. (Or at least that's my story and I'm sticking with it.)

I have many folders named *textures, elements, work in progress,* and so on, and my favorite image file is named *Junk Yard*. *Junk Yard* contains all the unfinished projects that I've tentatively given up on, but on which I worked very hard and don't want to delete. I began the image *Escape Velocity* with the central winged female from *Junk Yard,* and I had an "aha" moment. I remembered a red hand that I'd created for another project, and on the way to finding it by browsing dozens of files I ran across some skull images. These were outtakes from the session with the model used for the winged female and cloud images. Many of these forgotten files ended up in this finished piece as a result of searching for the one remembered image. I love it when a specific idea and pure chance commingle in the creation of a finished piece.

The red hands and finger print images are derived of my own arm and hand, coated in paint, pressed onto a piece of black foamcore, and then photographed. A skull enlarged to the size of the entire background is covered with numerous images from the session with the central figure—the prone figure across the bottom of the frame—being most prominent. Cloud and fog layers were added in a number of different blending modes and opacities to blend the background images and keep them subtle and ambiguous.

➤ *Escape Velocity,* finished image

➤ Hands

➤ A woman in flight element

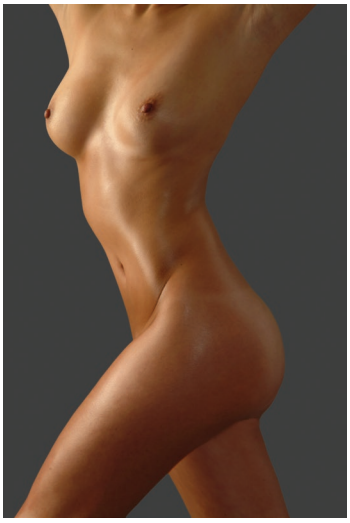
➤ The skull in the background

19 Etched in Stone

This piece was created shortly after I'd begun to use Photoshop software as a fine art tool. I created a finished and obviously manipulated image using Photoshop not just to correct and enhance a photograph, but as the mechanism and technology to create the finished image. Photoshop is not just used to enhance photographs, but as a fine art medium in itself. This idea has guided my work ever since.

I have a large number of finished pieces in which a nude torso was modified with a number of overlying textures. The female nude is the very oldest and most ubiquitous theme in all of human image-making. Using the newest methods of digital image-making (*i.e.,* Photoshop) to digitally apply texture over an image in the theme of the world's oldest artifact caught, and continues to hold my attention. I have frequently reminded myself and others that because a particular subject or theme has been favored frequently does not mean that there aren't many more opportunities and alternative approaches.

In this particular example, a single texture has been manipulated as an overlay for a single nude torso. The torso was photographed in the studio, and the texture was from the snapshot of a rock face. The color harmony was achieved as a result of the texture combined with a layer blending mode. In this case, early on in my digital adventure, a single texture layer was used. With one texture layer and one blending mode, the possible results become fairly predictable. However, when multiple textures, blending modes, layer orders, and adjustment layers are used, the number of possible permutations and visual outcomes becomes astronomical.



◀ The torso

◀ Rock face texture

➤ *Etched in Stone,* finished image

20 Gravity's Consent

The principal subject for the image *Gravity's Consent* was captured in a friend's studio with light from the floor-to-ceiling north-light windows and a single full-length silver reflector. Cindy Romano has since sold this Chicago area studio and moved to Arizona. I've told her that her change in locality has eliminated my access to a superior shooting site, but I greatly appreciate the many times she shared her studio.

Features from a number of faces were used in the hour glass which was composed of a single bottle that was duplicated and flipped vertically. I'm especially proud of the curve that runs from the dress into the hour glass. Getting just the right curve required repeated trial-and-error attempts with the Liquify filter to find the appropriate radius. The row of trees was added as a single selection from an image of a windbreak row on a nearby farm. The flock of birds was assembled from a number of smaller flocks and individual birds. And finally, the moonlike orb behind the subject was a circular selection from the interior enamel bottom of my favorite Dutch oven. I have used images of the same Dutch oven repeatedly as texture overlays. I re-photograph it regularly because the pattern and texture changes with each use.

I like to cook, and I've found the kitchen in general to be the source of a great diversity of textures: pot bottoms, cutting boards, food stains, sliced onions, n water, among many others. More than one meal has been delayed while I gathered images of kitchen textures. I've noticed that sooner or later, captures that come from personal interests—other than commissioned image-making—end up being prominent in my images. Not surprisingly, this underscores the importance of making images personal to distinguish style.

▲ Image straight out of camera

▲ An hourglass element from an earlier project

▲ Postproduction in progress

➤ *Gravity's Consent*, finished image

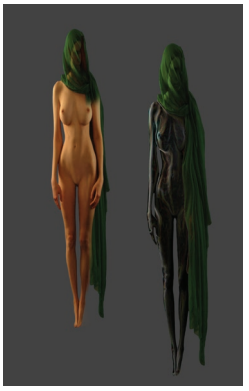
21 Grief

Making images personal contributes to our style. The image *Grief* is a very personal image, although I didn't realize it was until it was almost complete. One of my regularly used concepts is to capture a subject in three similar poses juxtaposed with the same subject in a different complementary pose. I had begun the image with the full length subject seen in the right half of the frame with sheer green fabric tied around her head without any previsualized concept. I then took three images of the same subject lying prone, with her arms crossed over her chest, and created tombs for them assembled from elements captured in New Orleans cemeteries.

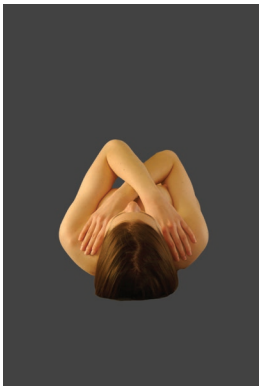
The green palette took over, but I struggled with a number of false starts trying to stick with my concept of three poses and a fourth complementary pose. It suddenly became obvious to me that I was expressing grief for both my parents who had each died in the three-year span immediately before I began the image. The completion of *Grief* followed very quickly after I removed one of the three tombs. The fabric trailing from the standing subject was manipulated in the Liquify filter, and it became a kind of root system for the flowers. The flowers themselves were formed from multiple captures of the same inexpensive silk lily. The halos and candelabra were added and I was finished. The piece was in fact very personal, but I'd not become aware of it until I'd been at work on the image for some time.

The second revelation for me concerning *Grief* was well after I'd completed it and was looking at a book of symbolist painters, and I realized that a painting by Carlos Schwabe that I'd seen some years earlier had been an inspiration for my image.

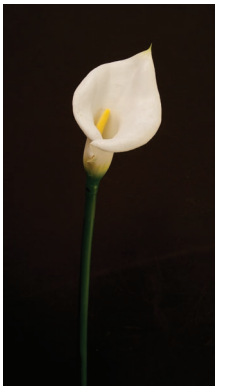
➤ *Grief*, finished image



➤ The central figure



➤ Prone figure element



➤ Lily

➤ Carlos Schwabe, *La Douleur* (The Pain)

22 Haiku

The image *Haiku* represents an exploratory change in direction for me and a trial run with a new work process. Many of my images are complex in terms of Photoshop technique and the sheer numbers of elements, textures, and layers involved. *Haiku* involves a mere four elements: the central subject, the cardinal, the architecture, and the moon. There are no textures, and only a handful of Photoshop techniques were used to select and place the elements. I deliberately resisted my usual technique of the using texture layers to integrate and meld the elements together. Abandoning the use of textures pushed me to be a little more careful and precise about the blending of the other elements. The result is a look that had not been typical of my work.

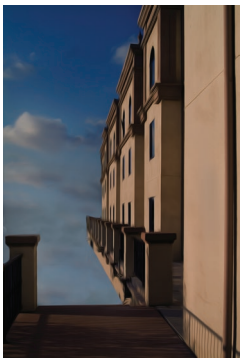
The central subject was posed by the model Amelia in a quasi-steampunk Victorian wardrobe and was captured on a neutral gray background in the studio. The architecture was simplified by removing all but the essential elements and floats with no apparent ground beneath it. The dark moon was created from a snapshot image of a blood moon eclipse taken long before I even thought of becoming a photographer. Although grainy and very small in the frame, a print of the moon was scanned and passed repeatedly though the Reduce Noise filter, and a crescent was added with a selection and Curves adjustment layer. The cardinal, from my personal image stock, was posed on the subject's hand.

Our styles are predicated on the details of our work process including its technical, conceptual, and personal elements. I think we benefit by occasionally changing some element in our process simply as an experiment to see what happens and to distinguish the important parts of our process from what is merely habit.

➤ *Haiku,* finished image

▲ Straight out of camera

▲ Cardinal



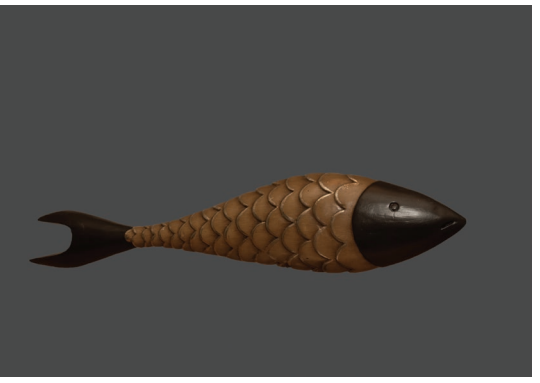
▲ Architecture

23 I Dream of Fish

The image *I Dream of Fish* was created from only three images: one of the model in profile, one of the model's left eye, and one of an inexpensive decorative fish that has appeared in many of my images. The model with her shaved head was quite striking to begin with, but I couldn't resist the temptation to use a fish motif with both the subject and the background.

The technique utilizes the Free Transform command in a step and repeat procedure that duplicates the image onto a new layer and repeats each Free Transform command based on the original transformation. A layer with a single selected image of the fish was active. Holding down the Alt, Command, and T keys on a single layer with the selected fish put the transformation on its own new layer. The Enter or Return key was pressed to apply the transformation. Next, the Shift, Alt, Command, and T keys were pressed simultaneously to put each new copy of the object on its own layer. For numerous copies, the Shift, Alt, and Command keys can remain held down while the T key is tapped. The transformation will be repeated each on its own layer. The technique works with all but the Warp tool and creates a large number of layers very quickly. The layers can be organized into groups using Command G and flattened using Command E to put them on a single layer.

The step and repeat technique was used throughout the *I Dream of Fish* image to create multiple groups of fish transformations. Some were flattened for the background, and others were flattened and used as textures over the subject and masked back over the eyes and lips. In some cases, groups of transformed fish were flattened and transformed with the Liquify filter to shape texture layers to conform to the figure layer. The background was assembled from several flattened groups of fish.



▲ The ubiquitous ornamental fish

▲ Postproduction in progress

▲ Original capture

▲ *I Dream Of Fish*, finished image

24 Urban Mermaids

I usually begin images with my own concept, but occasionally I am lured into someone else's idea. Arabella, the model in this image, has been a muse and collaborator on many images. I was reluctant when she suggested mermaids, but in repayment for her service as muse on many prior images, I followed up on her suggestion.

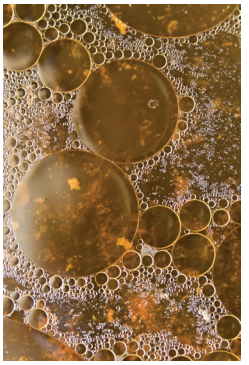
The captures of Arabella were achieved by shooting down from a tall step ladder as she posed on the floor. I asked her to visualize twin mermaids as they ascended toward the water's surface and she achieved the look perfectly. Down shooting provides for great spontaneity from the subject, the look of flying, jumping, falling and a range of gravity defying looks that can be achieved without the necessity of dangling a subject from the ceiling or shooting underwater and personally getting wet. I've seen many brilliant underwater images. I've just never had the resources or willingness to try them myself.

Arabella appears as both of the twin mermaids and in several other more subtle images at the bottom of the frame. A street scene from midtown Manhattan was retrieved from my personal stock files to serve as the background. The tail fin for the mermaids was also crafted from a stock image, as were the fish seen throughout the background. The bubbles were taken from an image of bacon grease on water from a pan in my sink waiting to be washed. The color was manipulated to achieve an underwater coolness and the overhead surface of the water was created with Flood, a plugin by Flaming Pear Software. I use very few plugins, because almost everything can be achieved in Photoshop. However, plugins can save time for some regularly used effects. A final black & white layer was added using a Soft Light mode to boost local contrast.

➤ *Urban Mermaids*, finished image

▲ Figure element

▲ Figure element



▲ Oil on water

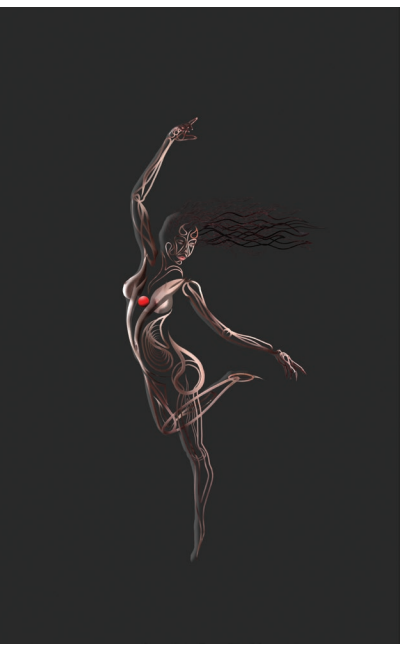
▲ The fish element for the mermaid tails

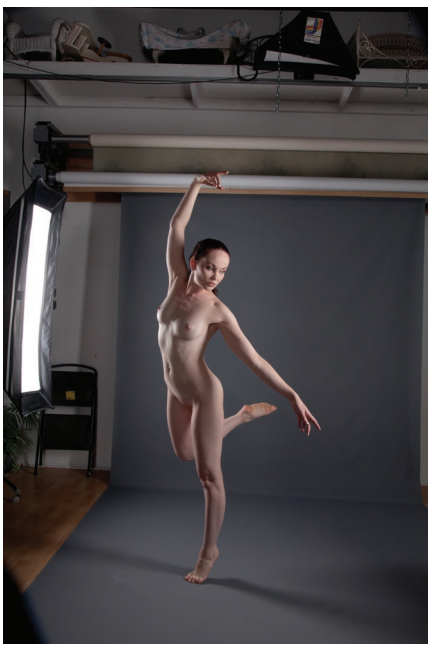
25 Alone on the Planet

This image is the manipulation of a live action photograph. I'm pleased to say that when I show my work in a gallery or art fair, first time viewers frequently ask what kind of paint I use, and almost never perceive the work as photography. I don't try to hide the fact that it's photographic—I'm proud of that—but I do like to create uncertainty and curiosity about what the medium is when it is first seen.

I've had wonderful collaborations with a number of traveling Australian fine art models. I like to think that they've each told the next model planning a visit to make sure to stop in Chicago and see me. A single session with Anne Duffy resulted in a number of finished pieces, created over a period of years.

The pose was entirely her contribution; the concept was mine. The technique that was used is an elaboration of the one used for the image *Cubist Blue Spirit* in section 16. Like any regularly used technique, it has evolved and become blended with other techniques to generate a new look. In the image *Alone on the Planet,* the entire figure was recreated from individual selections of the torso, limbs, and other features put on their own layers. The selections were modified (Select>Modify>Contract) and applied in an amount determined by trial and error, typically 10–30 pixels. The delete key was then pressed resulting in the centers of the original selections being deleted. Applying this technique to the entire figure resulted in dozens of individual selections on their own layers. The original background layer was deleted, leaving the figure as a filigree formed of the collected selections. Various layer styles and blending modes were used on each of the selections. Finally, a background was pieced together from a variety of shapes and textures.





◀ The selections during postproduction

◀ The original capture

➤ *Alone on the Planet,* finished image

26 Mistake

We all like to be responsible for our images by studying our craft and mastering technique. We have certain ideas and assumptions that we believe are fundamental requirements for a good image. Among those might be "getting the correct exposure is essential to a good image" or many other basic assumptions about the photographic craft. But occasionally we just have to accept mistakes as an opportunity we never saw coming.

During a workshop session with model Amy Rose, a wireless slave malfunction resulted in exposures being made from the single low wattage modeling light from behind the camera position. When I opened them in Photoshop, the exposures captured as RAW files, looked nearly black with almost no discernible detail. Ordinarily, I would delete such files, but I wanted to see just how much latitude was available in a RAW file. As I experimented with sliders and brought up the over all exposure, brightness and contrast, I was amazed by what I saw. It bore a resemblance to a late 19th century Pre-Raphaelite painting. Although the light had been flat and frontal and greatly less than indicated for a good exposure, I loved the look of the warm color and the frontal light with the edges and contours of the subject looking something like a low key ring light.

I'm sure, if I tried, I could experiment and find a technique that would achieve the same look with a correct exposure. But I'd much rather create it with my accidental method as a reminder that a creative insight is often the result of purely unintended accident and an alternative to some assumptions we made were fundamental. The history of both science and art contains many creative moments that were the result of pure accident.

▲ The underexposed capture adjusted in Camera Raw

▲ The intended lighting

▲ Pose variation

➤ *Mistake,* finished image

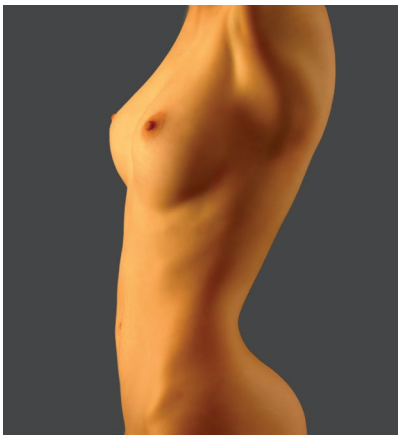
27 Butterfly Torso

The image *Butterfly Torso* consists of only two photographs: a female torso and a single blue butterfly. The butterfly was selected, duplicated, repeatedly on new layers, and arranged by eye into a texture that covered the entire frame. The torso was selected, sized, and centered in the frame.

The butterflies were flattened into a single texture layer and blending modes were tested by trial and error until the Difference mode was selected. Many of my color palettes are achieved using blending modes. In this case the Difference blending mode resulted in a color that yielded its complement.

Textures can be applied to objects in a number of ways. Originally I used the somewhat tedious method of Displacement Maps, which required repeated trial and error attempts. I greatly prefer working by eye in real time, and once I discovered the Liquify filter as an alternative method, I've used it ever since. The Free Transform command works well for coarse adjustment of textures followed by the Liquify filter, which I use in a way similar to drawing tools.

I make the larger manipulations within the Liquify filter window using the Forward Warp tool, in this case by moving the texture to visually complement the underlying contours of the torso. I frequently use both the Pucker and Bloat tools to fine-tune the manipulation. On areas of the torso that are nearer to the camera I'll use the Bloat tool on the curves of the breast, hips and all the way down the midline of the torso in areas that advance toward the camera. Along the perimeter of the torso, I'll use the Pucker tool to give the sense that the texture is receding and wrapping around the torso. Obviously, the technique can be used on any texture and object combination, not just butterflies and torsos.



A torso

The butterfly image used to contract the texture overlay

▲ *Butterfly Torso*, finished image

28 Balthus

Megan Camper has modeled for my images many times and I prefer to photograph Megan in her home because it has a history of our many collaborations. Her home is comfortable, though not a lavish show place, and we have managed to create some elaborate transformations of her space. The image *Balthus* was initiated during a break while shooting for an entirely different concept. Megan relaxed on the sofa while I sat in a chair across the room, and I imagined a composition much

- Straight out of camera *(top)*
- Balthus, *The-Golden-Days*, 1944-46 *(center)*
- Titian, *Venere di Urbino* (Google Art Project) *(bottom)*
- Megan's image from the same session used in the wall print in the finished image

▲ *Balthus*, finished image

like the Renaissance painter Titian's *Venus of Urbino*. I've always appreciated the way his backgrounds were divided in half vertically and have a horizon line placed on both a third and the half horizontal segment. I coached Megan into a more sultry, almost suggestive pose similar to a Balthus painting, and the other elements fell into place during postproduction.

Megan's cat posed himself several times at several different places on and around the sofa. I selected him and used three poses around in the image. The two full length framed images, also of Megan, were photographed by window light two feet to the left of the sofa on which Megan is shown in the finished image. The trees and the moon were added to the upper right quadrant of the image later and are the only elements that were not photographed within several feet of the pictured sofa.

Some years ago, after selling my brick and mortar studio, I was greatly inspired in location work by photographer and friend Alan "Fuzzy" Duenkel. Although we have very different approaches to image-making, he taught me to appreciate the possibilities of almost any location. I wish I had Fuzzy's talent for squeezing everything out of a location and doing it in camera.

29 Venus in Transit

I know that I want my style to show without my inspiration being too obvious an imitation. My plan is always to steal ideas and transform them into my own. But sometimes, I just have to yield to my love of certain artists and simply imitate them. This is the history of art; we began by imitating those who inspired us with the hope of eventually evolving into a style of our own. So, I make no apologies for unabashedly imitating the French academic painter William-Adolph Bouguereau and I've advanced my craft by doing so.

The Australian model Anoush Anou posed as both subjects for the image on a neutral grey background. I use medium gray as a background because, although other options might make it even easier to select a subject, green, blue and even black or white may leave a color cast or be difficult to use with transparent fabric. For several hours Anoush improvised poses in window light with a several-yard length of sheer beige fabric. Although shutter speeds and ISOs must be considered carefully to avoid motion blur, I appreciate the latitude for movement for the subject that a long bank of windows offers.

Among many possibilities, these two poses were chosen for the final image. The relative proportions of the two poses were established on the basis of the golden proportion with a ratio of 1.618, an infallible tool for composition. A texture was added to disguise the floor of the studio and provide a horizon line above which were added clouds and sky and an oversized crescent moon. A duplicate layer from a composite of all the layers was added to the top of the stack in an Overlay blending mode, then given a moderate to high Gaussian blur with the layer opacity reduced to taste.

- ➤ *Anoush*, finished image *(facing page)*
- ➤ *The Birth of Venus* by William-Adolphe Bouguereau, 1879 *(bottom left)*
- ➤ Straight out of camera *(bottom middle left)*
- ➤ Straight out of camera *(bottom middle right)*
- ➤ Background *(bottom right)*

30 Megan and Shadow

The paintings of Caravaggio are known for chiaroscuro, which is simply the Italian word for light and dark. Caravaggio and the many painters, photographers, and filmmakers that have since been inspired by him use the contrast of light and dark to achieve a sense of spacial volume in their images. This image is one of many I've made with model Megan, in her own home, with her own furnishings, and occasionally with her dog Shadow. Having shifted from working in my own studio to working in other studios or on location, I have come to especially love location situations that are familiar to the subject. Their home, workplace, or accustomed locations

are places that are important and familiar to the subject.

I felt the need to do something with a classic painterly look that did not rely heavily on postproduction. Megan's room and décor seemed entirely appropriate for such an image: the brocade pattern and color palette of her bedspread and pillow shams provided the perfect set. I precariously rigged a small strip light overhead, and a fill light was bounced of the wall immediately behind the camera providing just enough light to fill in important shadow detail, but leaving a dramatic ratio with the overhead light, as one would do for chiaroscuro.

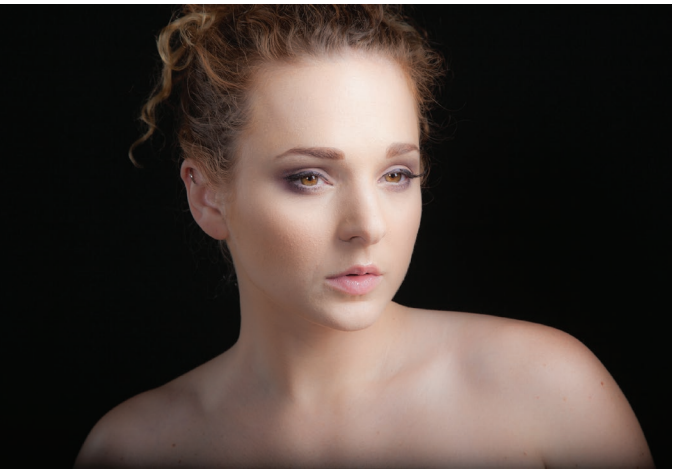
▲ Straight out of camera

When Shadow (the dog) jumped on the bed and Megan began to cuddle with him, I jumped at the opportunity. I loved the result in which the dog is camera aware and Megan seems blissfully unaware of anything other than her own dog in her own environment. Had I taken the time to remove the alarm clock, I would have missed the shot. I assumed at the time that I would take it out in post, but I like the counterpoint it provided and left it. Only the most fundamental retouching was applied to the image.

◀ *Megan and Shadow,* finished

31 Catherine

I frequently create complex, composited images with dozens—and sometimes even hundreds—of layers. But when a session with model Cat Hedlund yielded this striking head shot, I realized that a simple treatment was called for. I rarely produce high key images but it seemed to be the right choice for her fair skin and red hair. The ambiguous off-camera stare and expression demanded my attention, as I hope it does from other viewers.



The capture was made with the very standard lighting design using a medium soft box to the right of camera and a low ratio fill light behind the camera. In this book I've never made reference to a specific light ratio or f stop. I don't record it, I rarely remember, and I'm of the opinion that given the digital technology allowing immediate feedback, we should use our concepts and our eyes. This is not to say that returning to conventional technology isn't a very useful and productive choice for some image makers at some times. We choose the process that suits us at a specific time in our careers and experience. There are no one-size-fits-

➤ Image as captured *(top)*

➤ Texture from a William Turner painting *(bottom)*

▲ *Catherine*, finished image

all rules. Ultimately, it's about the image and for most of us, luck and circumstances lead to our first good images and we then spend our time trying to understand what we did right so we can do it again.

Here's a confession: the texture for this image was taken from a very small section of a painting by William Turner. I occasionally use textures from my favorite (and public domain) artists. They are usually discrete and unidentifiable, but in this case, Mr. Turner's texture works so well I had to leave it at full opacity and confess.

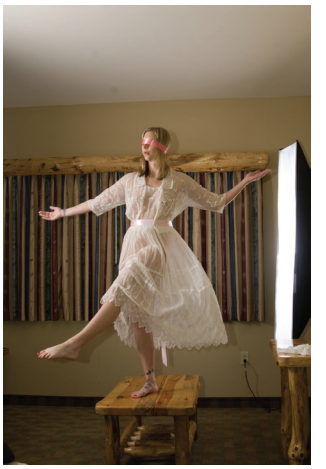
32 Economic Recovery

The shift from studio to location photography, combined with the transition from traditional to digital capture, changed almost everything about my work. I am not suggesting that everyone should abandon their studios, but for me, the combination of the uncertainties and challenges of location shooting combined with the vast new opportunities of digital postproduction changed everything.

Images of the model, whose name is Timeless Nikki, were captured in the less-than-optimal conditions of a hotel room. I was at a convention near her home in Seattle and she joined me for the session. I'd brought wardrobe and lights with me and we photographed a number of concepts in a very short time. Shown here is Nikki balancing precariously on a coffee table, blindfolded with a pink ribbon. Nikki had seen my work and trusted that I had a concept, but it could not have been clear to her at the time.

All of the other images were assembled in Photoshop after the session. Tribune Tower in the background was taken while on a commercial assignment on the 40th floor of an adjacent building. The tightrope was assembled from dollar bills, the candelabra was from personal stock, a moon was composed that includes both the model's face and the eye of Providence from the dollar bill. In the full-size print the viewer can also see two nefarious figures with a torch at the far end of the tightrope and in many of the building windows are seen many different poses of Nikki.

The postproduction may appear extensive, but the actual techniques are simple. The buildings were manipulated with the Liquify filter, textures were applied in various blending modes, and selections were made of each of the many subjects and objects throughout the images. The image was time consuming, but not overly complicated.



➤ *Economic Recovery,* finished image

➤ Tribune Tower background *(left)*

➤ Detail of finished image *(center)*

➤ Original capture from a makeshift hotel room studio *(right)*

ANNUIT

33 Zebra Ass Hand on Fire

A frivolous image deserves a frivolous title. I am unable to remember the original title given to this finished piece, but as she has done for many of my images, my wife had given it the tongue-in-cheek working title of *Zebra Ass Hands on Fire,* and it has stubbornly persisted. However, I refer to the image here simply as *Zebra*.

Zebra was created with images of the model Kat. Well after our last session I began playing with some of the images I'd not yet used. With no plan and no pre-visualization, I began piecing various images together: some candles, the rear view of a zebra from a recent trip to the zoo, a striped silk bedspread from a hotel stay somewhere, an antique candelabra, and the surface of my frequently photographed enamel cooking pot bottom *(see page 14)*. The various elements were selected casually, almost randomly, and gradually assembled. *Zebra* emerged as the result of pure playing around with no expectations. Something creative can be achieved by just playing, without any judgment or expectations for the result.

I was especially pleased with the candelabra and figure candles in the bottom right corner. All three figures are those of Kat from live action figure studies. Levels, Curves, and painting with the Brush tool on a blank layer in Color Blend Mode gave the figures a waxen candle-like look. The figures were selected and placed in the candelabra with a wick and flame added at the top. I have since used this figure candelabra in a number of other images. I replaced the subject's fingers with candles and greatly exaggerated her hair with a combination of the Brush tool and the Liquify filter. The background was assembled from the images of the striped satin quilt and the circular pot bottom texture made more spherical with a Bevel & Emboss layer style.

➤ *Zebra Ass Hands on Fire,* finished image

➤ Straight out of camera

➤ Figure candles from an earlier project

➤ Silk bedspread used as background texture

➤ A zoo shot of the zebra element

34 Isis

Isis was an Egyptian goddess worshipped by slaves and aristocrats alike as the ideal mother and wife, as well as the goddess of magic. Her extensive mythology inspires a wide range of possibilities for image-making. This image of Isis utilizes a Free Transform command step and repeat method described for the image *I Dream of Fish (see section 23)*.

The subject sat nude on a sofa while I was arranging lights for another concept. With just a few small adjustments to the pose I photographed her with the very flat light of the modeling lights bounced of the ceiling and wall above and behind her. Other than the subject, the only other element captured in camera was the gold fabric wound around her legs. The headdress, background and pattern on her skin were all created by taking a single small leaf into the free transform command, step and repeat technique. A variety of patterns were created with the single leaf and then flattened into single layers. The layers were then taken into the Liquify filter and further manipulated to conform to the model and compositional concept of the background.

This image evolved from a series of totally spontaneous captures, and postproduction choices. As I've said elsewhere, some of my images are fully pre-visualized, while others evolve over the course of very long periods. I've come to realize that all images exist in potential. It is our job to recognize them when they occur, whether in our minds before they are created or in a series of spontaneous moments during the process. To the viewer, the finished image is all that matters; the process of creation is just trivia. For the creator, however, establishing a personal process is critical.

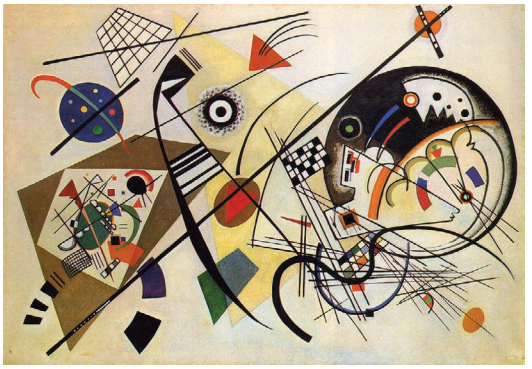
▲ Straight out of camera

▲ A Free Transform step and repeat technique of a single leaf

➤ *Isis*, finished image

35 Kandinsky Tattoo

This texture-over-torso image, *Kandinsky Tattoo* was created through my attempt to more fully understand the work of painter Wassily Kandinsky. The image began with a down-shot of a rose. I'd used the image on personal greeting cards but I never felt the image reflected my style. One part of allowing a personal style to evolve is self-editing of our images and removing those that don't reflect our style. I manipulated the rose with a range of selections linking and layering the selections in what I perceived as a study of Kandinsky. It was good exercise, but again, I didn't feel or expect the result to reflect my style.



However, once I used the fractured rose as an overlying texture on a nude torso, the image began to make sense to me a representative of my style. The rose as a manipulated texture is used three times in the image, once on the torso and once again on each thigh. The rose-texture layer was manipulated with both the Free Transform command and the Liquify filter to adjust them to the underlying contours of the torso. Finally, the combined textures were trimmed by using an inverted selection of the torso, activating the texture layer and pressing the delete key to remove the texture from areas outside the torso.

Walking the line between inspiration and direct imitation can be difficult. In some cases, such as with the image *Kandinsky Tattoo,* I think I've walked the line successfully, and let Kandinsky inspire me without the finished piece being a direct imitation. In other cases, I've learned a great deal from work that I felt was inspired by another only to decide that the finished work was far too imitative to claim as my own.

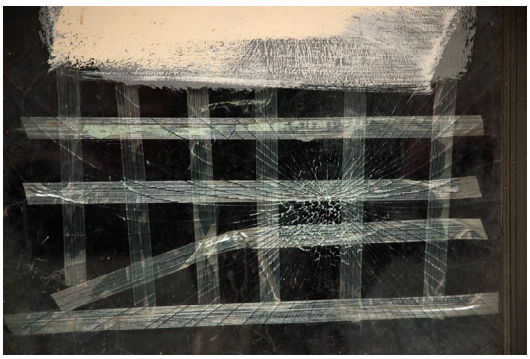
- Down shot of a rose *(top)*
- My Kandinsky experimentation *(middle)*
- *Transverse Line* (1923) by Kandinsky *(bottom)*
- *Kandinsky Tattoo,* finished image

▼ *Thanks Ed*, finished image

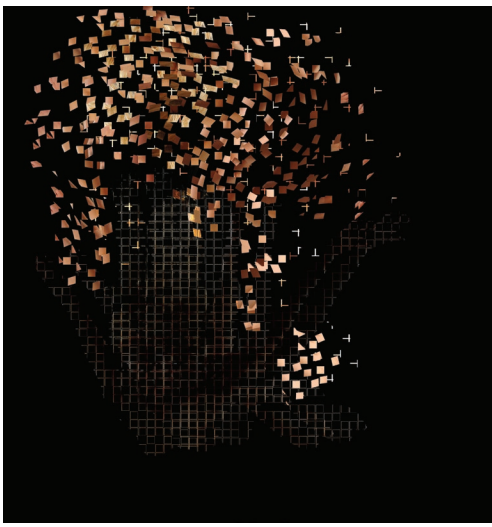
The image *Thanks Ed* is a tribute to the late Chicago painter Ed Paschke, who died in 2004. The influence of Paschke may not be obvious to anyone but myself, but I think it's often the case that inspiration and influence are not apparent to a viewer who is not familiar with the source of the inspiration. Various biographies list Paschke's influences which were at first cartoons and animation and eventually Gauguin, Picasso, and Seurat. Having read about these influences, I can see them in his work, but I would probably not have known from viewing the work alone.

My knowledge of exactly how the image was created is based on vague recollection. Early on, I never seemed to have enough external memory to save images with large numbers of layers, so I flattened them. Eventually, I could afford sufficient memory, but flattening the image has become a part of my process. I wanted new images to be guided by my imagination and not by the specific techniques of past images.

The model lay over a horizontal bar and the image was flipped vertically with the bar removed so that she appeared to be falling. To the best of my recollection, the square tiles were created by equally spaced, black vertical and horizontal lines in a single layer grid. The lines were selected, and the selection inverted. With a composite layer active the selection was used to create a new layer of tiles. The resulting layer was manipulated with the Liquify filter and selectively masked. Several layers of tiles and textures in various orders and blending modes were utilized in the final image. If we know what we want to see, we can, through trial and error, find a technique to support our imagination.



▲ A photographic element used in the background construction



➤ An isolation of the tiles element

37 Particulation

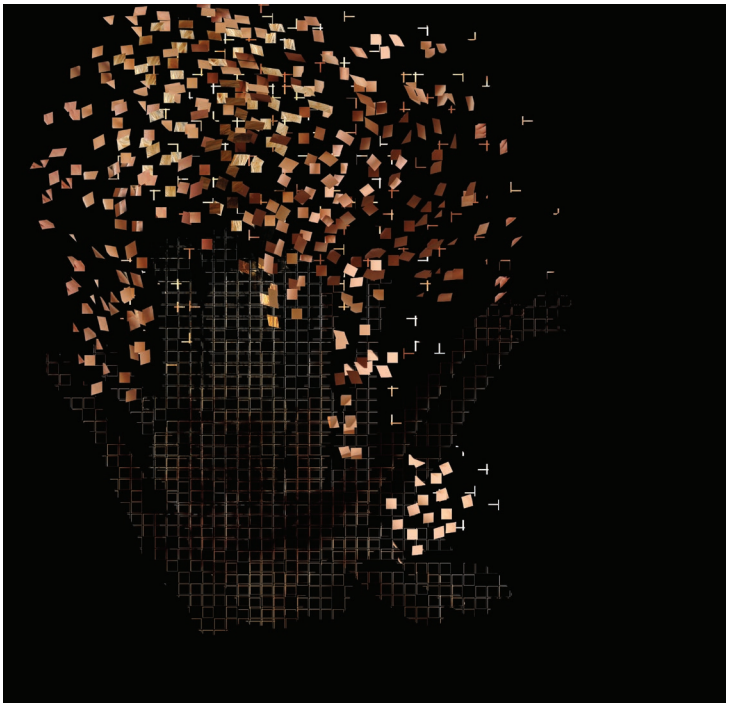
I don't always remember how I've done something in the past, but I find a way to do it when it's what I want to see in my current work. While working on the image *Particulation* I began to visualize something similar to what I had done in the image *Thanks Ed (see section 36)*. I'd not yet flattened and archived *Thanks Ed* so I opened it up and pulled the tile layers onto the *Particulation* project file to see how it looked. I'd wanted only to test the concept before investing the time to try it on this image, but as I pulled the grouped layers in the file I was impressed with how well the color palette of the first was matched to my current piece.

I flattened the tile group layer that I'd just copied from my other project, duplicated the layer, and then flipped it vertically. Both the original layer and the duplicate were moved around, one toward the top of the frame, the other toward the bottom. The upper group remains nearly identical to the original from *Thanks Ed*. The lower half was manipulated using the Liquify filter and by experimenting with blending modes. Although my intent was merely to test the concept, it worked so well, I saw no reason to reinvent the element.

The underlying subject face is that of the traveling fine-art model Betcee Mae. Her figure has been used in several of my pieces, and her face has been used in many others, sometimes as the central subject and other times as a secondary or subliminal element. Artists speak of having a muse; I feel that I've had many. Almost every model and subject that I've had the honor of working with has been my muse of the moment in an effort to create an image that is unique to our collaboration.

▼ The original head-and-shoulder capture

▼ The repurposed sailing tiles from the *Thanks Ed* image



➤ *Particulation*, finished image

38 Leap of Faith

Generally, when demonstrating lighting and posing in a lecture or workshop situation, I do not do my best work. I concentrate more on teaching and sharing information than on a visual concept or rhythm of work with a model. *Leap of Faith* is an exception to that experience. While giving a demonstration to the Twin Cities PPA, I was on top of a tall ladder shooting down at the remarkable model known as E-string, when an entire visualization of the finished image popped into my head. Sometimes, the creative process is enabled by distraction instead of concentration; this was one such time.

As I've mentioned before, I often shoot down on a subject lying on the floor. In this case I suggested to the model that she was falling face-down through space. An assistant arranged her hair behind her to add to the effect. As I was shooting, I mentally turned the image to a vertical orientation and an entire visual plan for the image fell into place. The background uses the stairs of the Vatican Museum and a view of the oculus of the Pantheon in Rome. A general scheme of selections was designed that would articulate the subject. All of this occurred as I mentally rotated the image ninety degrees. Sometimes rotating an image to an orientation other than the one in which it was photographed induces a total new visualization of what the finished image might be.

As was described for the image *Cubist Blue Spirit (see section 16)*, the subject's form was articulated with multiple selections, each on an independent layer, and with a Bevel & Emboss layer style on each. *Cubist Blue Spirit*, one of my early uses of the technique, involved a handful of selections. This image, *Leap of Faith,* involved several dozen.

➤ *Leap of Faith,* finished image

➤ Straight out of camera

➤ The Vatican Museum stairway

➤ Oculus of the Pantheon in Rome

39 Let the Dead Bury the Dead

This is one of my earliest composited pieces and was inspired by one of my very favorite graveyards. I frequently visit graveyards not because I'm morose, but because I find them life-affirming. They remind me that life is short, so let's honor those that preceded us and get on with celebrating life. St. Louis Cemetery No. 1, a "City of the Dead," is my all time favorite cemetery and the source for all the images except the main figure in this work, *Let the Dead Bury the Dead*. Although a number of the graves have been well maintained or rehabilitated, most are in a state of graceful degradation and a great source of texture and inspiration.

The textures from a particular city are distinct from those in other cities. New Orleans' textures are different from those from New York, Denver, or Seattle. I've accumulated an enormous number of image textures from New Orleans in general and New Orleans cemeteries specifically. Although I have very few images that depict an identifiable New Orleans location, the textures and elements I've collected there have contributed to a large number of my finished pieces.

In the image *Let the Dead Bury The Dead* the tombs and graves are depicted just as they were without extensive compositing or manipulation, although the right and left sides of the image are taken from two different areas of St. Louis Cemetery No. 1. The figures are from three separate studio sessions of three different models selected

➤ A typical tomb from Saint Louis Cemetery in New Orleans, Louisiana *(top)*

➤ Tomb detail

from my personal stock for their suitability to the concept. The center brick tomb was dropped in with the palm branches just as they were photographed lying over the tomb. Although I placed the bright figure in the tomb, there were bones faintly visible through cracks in the disintegrating brick.

▲ *Let the Dead Bury the Dead*

40 A Breeze in the Woods

In recent years I have become overly enthusiastic about wardrobe, so much so that my friends are concerned that a man in his 60s is suddenly obsessed with women's apparel. I became obsessed with this vintage yellow dress when I first saw it at Cracker Jax, a store nearby my home with a wonderful collection of vintage clothing and jewelry. Lauren, the store's owner, rents items to me inexpensively in exchange for a small print from my session. I've begun to understand that fashion and apparel are, in some cases, fine art in themselves. An exhibition titled *Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity* held at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2012 helped me to more fully appreciate how and why, fashion is art.

To photographers, the flow and look of a fabric is far more important than the designer name or quality of the garment. This yellow dress responded perfectly to a small fan placed to camera right. The entire set was created in the narrow hallway of model Megan Camper's home with the strip light and fan aimed through the bathroom door, and the reflector taped tightly to the opposite wall. The moon, sky, trees, clouds, and leaves were all added in Photoshop, but the look and feel of the image is all about the flowy yellow dress and Megan's demure pose with broad lighting as she turned away from the light and the breeze. I didn't buy the yellow dress, and it was sold to someone else shortly after I returned it to Cracker Jax. I miss it terribly, and if you have my yellow dress, please, please sell it back to me.

➤ The original background layer modified from an earlier project *(left)*

➤ The straight out of camera hallway capture *(right)*

➤ *A Breeze in the Woods,* finished image

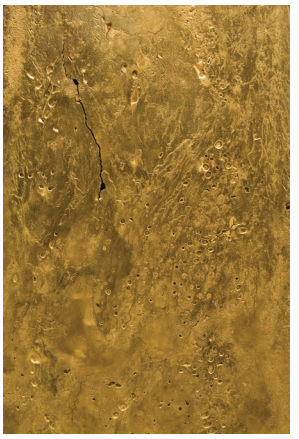
41 Oceanides

In Greek mythology, the Oceanides were the 3000 daughters of Oceanus and Tethys, who were thought to preside over the world's sources of fresh water. It is no secret that I am obsessed with including fish in my images, and *Oceanides* gave me the opportunity to use many fish to represent the collective goddesses of Ocenides. The image is composed of one stylized fish, several textures, and the face of the model Kat.

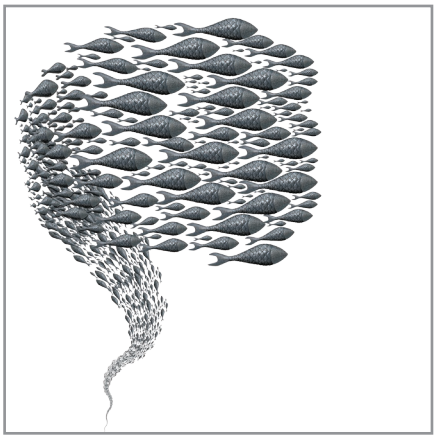
Three or four photographs of the same ornamental wooden fish were used to assemble the school of fish that comprises the head and face of the image. The fish were duplicated to their own layers and manipulated for shape and size using the Free Transform command. As large numbers of layers began to accumulate they were gathered into a number of groups of successively smaller fish. Copies of the groups were made and flattened. The flattened layers were further manipulated with the Liquify filter to achieve the look of a swirling school. Within the group that ultimately became an overlay for the face, each fish was sized and positioned individually to conform to the model's profile and flattened with all the various fish group layers into one layer. A selection of all the fish was inverted and used to delete all areas of the face that were not covered by the fish layer. The trailing fish were darkened and painted black to appear as trailing hair. The layer was given a low opacity Bevel & Emboss layer style.

The background was composed of several texture layers placed above a layer with a copy of the original head and shoulders layer of the model. A layer mask allowed a selective reduction in opacity sufficient to allow just the implied outline of the model's head and shoulders.

▲ The original from which the underlying face was used



▲ A primary texture overlay



▲ The final flattened fish layer

▲ *Oceanides*, finished image

42 Oracle

As portrait photographers we are expected to pose and direct our subjects. More often than not, it's the natural pose that's assumed by a subject between the directed poses that works best for the image. But working with a professional model calls for a different approach: a collaboration between the model and photographer in creating an image. Although I start with a concept in mind, I'm also open to what the model brings to a session. In this case, the experience and kinesthetic sense of Jessamyne, a fine art model from Australia, brought something to the image I would never have achieved on my own.

Jessamyne and I had been working for an hour or so and had begun to develop a rhythm. I styled the image simply with the choice of background and fabric. Jessamyne started with a pose that I suggested and then began a series of improvisations on the pose. I had shared with Jessamyne how inspired I was by the Pre-Raphaelite painters, and it was made obvious by her poses that she had a sense of those classic paintings. When she fell into this pose, she immediately looked so comfortable and appropriate that I knew that it would be the hero. I am known for extensive post-production, but in this case, I showed restraint in leaving it as it was captured in a collaboration between model and photographer.

The image was made with window light and a full-length dull silver reflector to camera right. A few subtle objects were added to the painted canvas background and the water at the bottom of the image was added in post with Flood—a Photoshop plugin *(see page 52)*. The feel and sense of the image was Jessamyne's spontaneously improvised pose.

◀ Straight out of camera

▶ *Oracle*, finished image

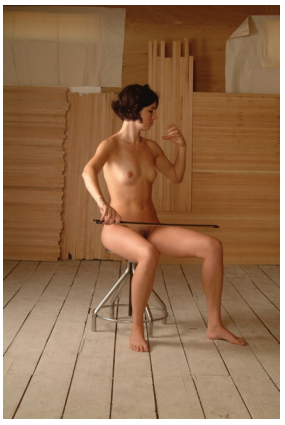
43 Performance

The same model is featured in this image as was the subject in the image *Portrait in B Minor* (section 15). The subject could not only play the cello, she was from a family of luthiers that could build and repair the instrument. The experience of a successful performance includes a range of emotional states from high anxiety to exhilaration. The opportunity to illustrate the performer being at one with her instrument was obvious and irresistible. The shape of a cello requires only the slightest leap of imagination to visualize as the back of a female torso. The same model is portrayed as the performer, the instrument, and as an exhilarated audience member.

The piece was created shortly after I began using Photoshop as more than a method to enhance my photography. All three images of the subject were photographed with the same straightforward lighting design: a softbox to camera left and a fill light over and behind the camera position. The model posed on a chair with her bow. She knelt on the floor with her back to the camera to model for the cello. And for the hand stand, she simply stood facing camera left with her hands held flat overhead and the image was flipped vertically. Finally, the cello was photographed with care to maintain the appropriate angle in reference to the performer.

Isolating the components of the cello and incorporating them with the model's back took a good deal of time due to my lack of experience in Photoshop, but the extra time spent resulted in the development of new Photoshop skills. Photoshop has a steep and nearly endless learning curve and requires time and persistence. However, the payoff for time spent is a bag of tricks useful for both personal and commissioned work.

➤ *Performance,* finished image



➤ Seated performer

➤ Cello figure element

➤ Handstand figure

44 Persephone

Titling a portrait once it's complete can be difficult. But titling a portrait before you create it is an opportunity for inspiration. When I'm stuck for inspiration on an upcoming session with a model, I often start with a title to see what visual concepts it evokes. An especially rich resource for portrait titles and concepts is a Google search for Greek and Roman deities.

Persephone, the Greek goddess, posed by model Arabella, was both queen of the underworld and associated with the fertility of spring. My image *Persephone* was derived without a specific visual concept, but instead an improvisational approach to the session. I gave Arabella a six yard piece of gold fabric, turned on the fan and began shooting as she danced with the fabric. Exposures were made with window light to the left and a large silver reflector to the right and behind the subject. With the camera on a tripod, the shutter speed ranged from between $\frac{1}{15}$ and $\frac{1}{30}$ of a second, allowing for sharpness at the high point of the model's movement and softness from motion blur in the flutter of the fabric. The hero pose was chosen from numerous outtakes with too much blur, too little blur, or composition that was less-than-compelling. Capturing the successful image is not always about previsualizing the result and precise execution, but about improvising, over-shooting, and ultimately having the visual experience to knowing the right exposure when we see it.

Postproduction for *Persephone* included the subtle addition of faces from Greek statuary to the fabric being held by the subject and a background with the Eye of Horus taken from a mosaic somewhere in the New York City subway system.

➤ *Persephone,* finished image

➤ Mosaic from the New York City subway system

➤ Straight out of camera

45 Debra

This is a portrait of Debra Keortke, a personal friend and the owner of the eclectic shop and art gallery Artemesia. I'm honored to be included in her gallery. This image was created in the studio with just window light and a reflector. Debra styled the session from her vast collection of one-of-a-kind items in her store.

With window light, I typically choose a traditional camera positioned at 90 degrees to the window giving the light direction. In this case I shot with the window light almost directly behind me and slightly to the left. Those of us with backgrounds in portraiture have been told repeatedly that flat light is a poor choice for modeling facial

➤ Main image, straight out of camera *(top)*

➤ Background construction *(bottom)*

➤ *Deborah*, finished image

features. But flat light can be beautiful, soft and forgiving and provide an almost ethereal glow to the skin. With the addition of a reflector positioned below and just out of frame, the image required no retouching. The file was given a boost with the High Pass filter to strengthen local contrast in the scarf and hair and masked away on the face to preserve the softness and glow.

The principal image was photographed on a medium gray background and the stylized moon, trees, and birds, common to many of my images, were added in Photoshop. A black & white layer was created on top from a composite layer of all the visible layers, and in Soft Light blending mode to add snap and local contrast to the face and clothing. Debra and I have collaborated on a number of images, but this one continues to be our favorite, and it can't hurt to do a good job with the gallery owner.

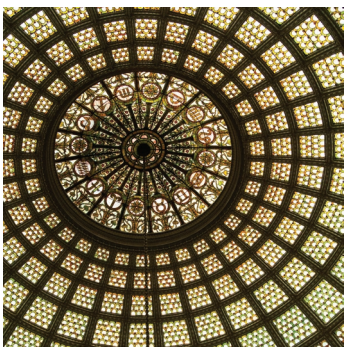
46 Lilith

Often depicted as a redhead, Lilith is a figure in Jewish mythology with a very broad range of stories, origins, and folklore attributed to her. Among the many stories is one telling that she was the first wife of Adam, created of the same Earth, but left the Garden of Eden when she refused to be subservient to Adam and later coupled with the archangel Samuel. No mater what folkloric tradition you choose, Lilith offers great visual inspiration.

My Lilith depiction uses a wide variety of textures and elements including the central subject, the dome of the Chicago Cultural Center, a Japanese maple, a large antique glass jug, and numerous figure studies of the model Jessamyne woven into the fabric draping the central depiction of Lilith. Several captures of Jessamyne's red hair were taken while she lay on white foamcore with her hair splayed out around her head. The hair was reassembled and integrated with the central image, which was captured utilizing a fan and fabric draping. Three small figure studies of Jesamyne, taken during the same session, are presented in the glass jug at the bottom right of the frame.

The Japanese maple in the background was manipulated with the Liquify filter in order to accommodate and mirror the round shape of the Chicago Cultural Center dome as shot from below. The green fabric drape on the subject was also worked with the Liquifiy filter to further mirror the shape of the dome and tree. A variety of texture layers and blending modes were incorporated both in the background and as overlays. The look of one texture and one blending mode becomes fairly easy to predict when you use them regularly. But the looks from several textures, blending modes, and order of layers provide an astronomical number of possibilities.

▲ The Japanese maple used in the background



▲ The dome of the Chicago Cultural Center, straight out of camera

▲ Principal image, straight out of camera

▲ *Lilith*, finished image

47 Ophelia

My idea for Ophelia, from Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* was simple. Of the many images of the drowning Ophelia, all are horizontal. I decided there should be at least one drowning Ophelia that was vertical. I photographed the subject from overhead and let her long red hair flow out above her. Rather than describing a specific pose, I find it's often much more successful to describe the concept and let the model improvise the pose.

In addition to the very obvious central figure of the subject, there are a number of other images of Ophelia. All are images from the same session, and some are more obvious then others. I often add figure and other elements at varying degrees of visibility and literal representation. I have always been inspired by the work of printmaker David Driesbach, and I have collected a number of his prints. Among the many things I appreciate about his prints are the revelations and changes in perception I've had of his prints even after they've hung in my home for many years. The prints remain engaging, and I never tire of them as they evolve with my perception of new elements and implied images in the figure ground relationships of the elements.

I've done my best to provide the same kind of opportunity for continued discovery in the content of my images, although I may not have done so nearly as skillfully as David Driesbach. I met David and his wife Maggie when they hired me for a family portrait. I'm thankful to have become acquainted with his work in the early 2000s just as I was beginning to treat my own photography as art. He's been a very significant influence in my development, as he has for many of his students over the course of his career.

➤ *Ophelia*, finished image

➤ Straight out of camera *(left)*

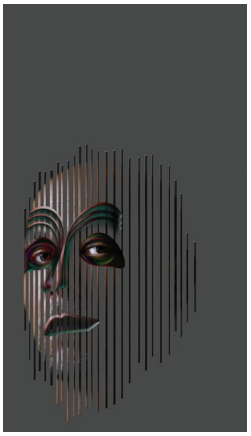
➤ Postproduction in progress showing two of the subliminal figures *(right)*

48 Charles Street

Charles' day job is as a lawyer, but in the evening he becomes a DJ, host, and entertainer in his large brownstone home. Well known to many who have attended his gatherings I wanted to create something that illustrated Charles and the complexity of his approach to life. Because his home is recognizable and familiar to so many in the community, I used it as the backbone of the concept. The house itself is repeated in a triangle, and a number of subordinate triangles from selections of texture are used as elements in the background. The palette is of colors selected from the facade of the house.

Artist, game maker, and author Chris Solarski, from his study of classical painting, draws the conclusion that emotion is conveyed through composition even more than through color and content. Furthermore, it is the similarity in composition between the subject and the background that creates harmony. Influenced by this notion, I depicted Charles with a series of narrow vertical selections much like the peak and level indicators of his DJ equipment and in harmony with angularity of the background. All of the vertical selections were collected in a group (shift-click to activate the layers, Command G to put them in a group). The group was flattened, a Command click on the layer thumbnail selected the grouped verticals, Shift>Command>I, inverted the selection. The layer containing Charles' face was activated and pressing the delete key eliminated all of the pixels that fell outside of the grouped vertical selections.

In addition to the verticals depicting the face, the features of Charles' eyes and lips are illustrated with additional circular and horizontal selections that emphasize facial details using horizontal lines and arcs that cut across the verticals and add a pinch of dissonance to the composition.



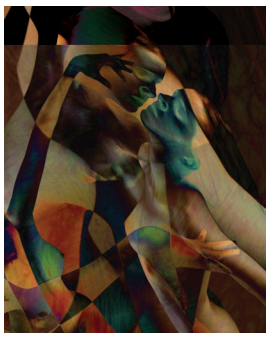
- Vertical selections of Charles' face *(left)*
- The house *(middle)*
- The background constructed from manipulation of the house image *(right)*
- *Charles Street,* finished image *(facing page)*

49 Hidden Desire

In many cases, I have begun projects only to reach a point where I felt that the project was going nowhere or just did not reflect my style. Those projects linger on my hard drive, but are occasionally revisited and reborn through random circumstances. *Hidden Desire* resulted from a chance collision of several other unfinished projects.

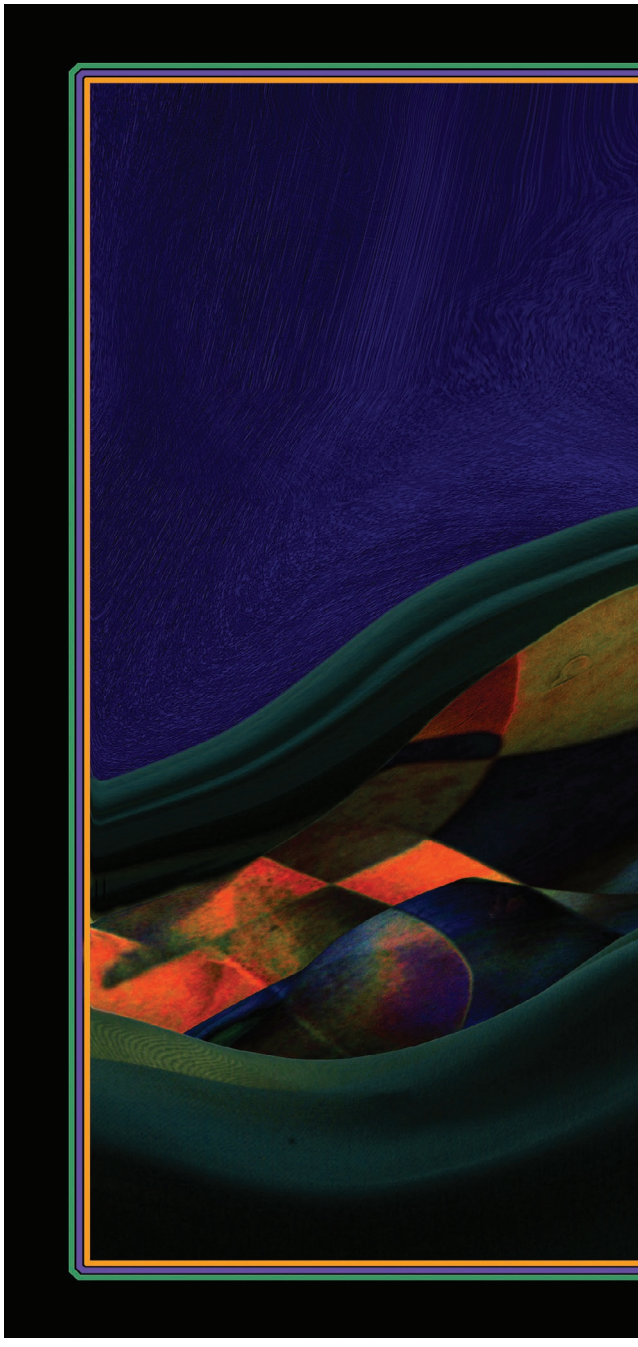
The original subject was taken in the studio without a specific concept. I played with the file until it resulted in a piece I felt looked more like a Georgia O'Keeffe flower than something of my style. Another project was of three combined poses of a single subject that I'd worked at for sometime without achieving anything I thought was a finished piece. Ultimately, I abandoned the project but saved a small section that I loved but again felt was not of my style.

At some point, I opened the O'Keeffe–like image file and accidentally rotated it ninety degrees. My "aha" moment came



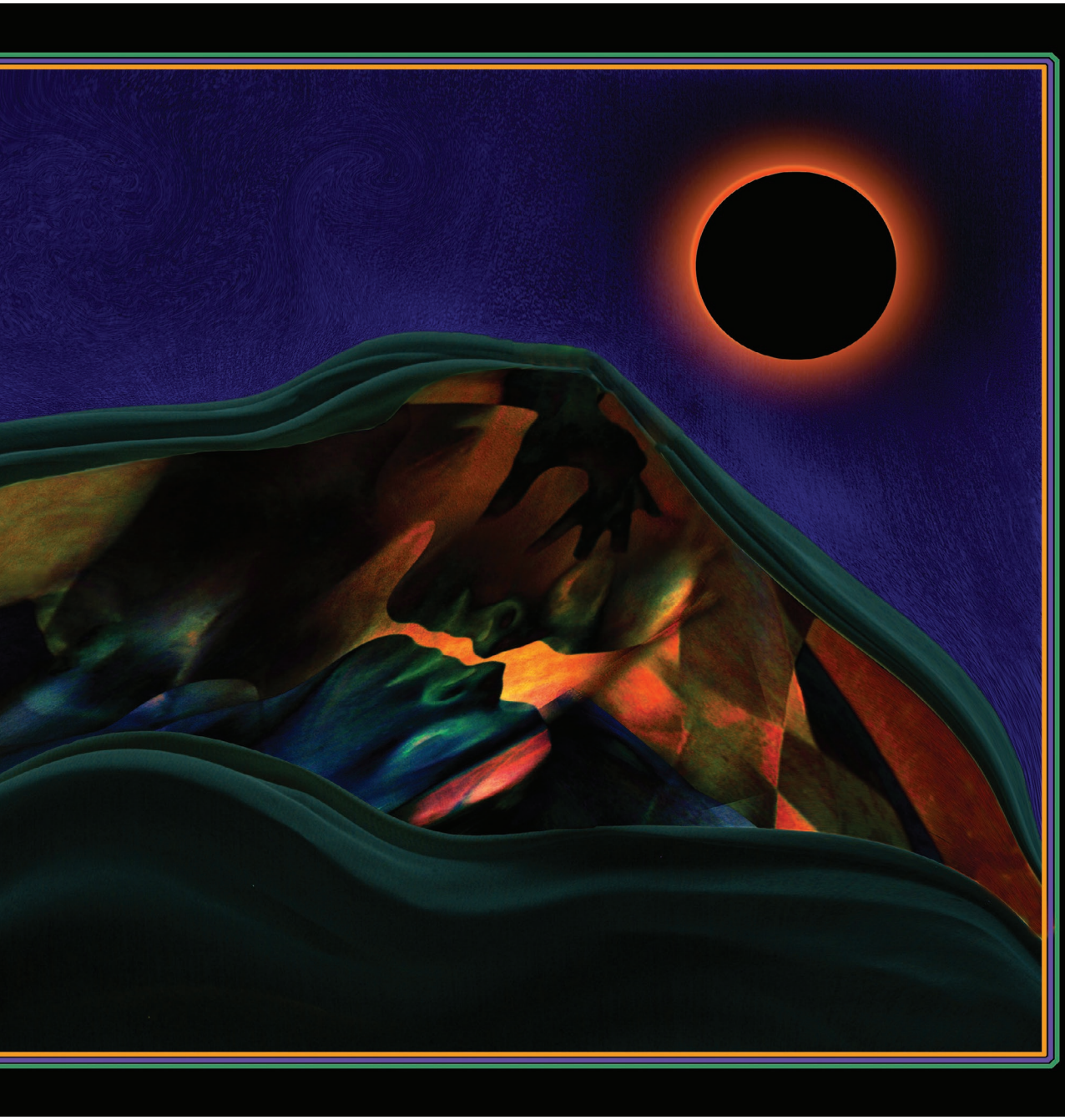
A segment from an earlier project *(left)*

The O'Keeffe–like image from a prior project



when I visualized the image not as a figure but as a landscape and the idea for a whole new concept took shape. I tracked down the saved portion of my earlier project with three subjects, rotated it ninety degrees, and masked it in as a secret vision within the landscape. The only original element for the finished piece was the eclipse added in the upper right. The rest of the image was created from the spare parts of earlier projects. The moral to this story is simply, don't give up on those projects that feel incomplete. They may ultimately take shape after years of lying around unfinished. I've had a number of finished images result from salvaging elements from a number of earlier projects.

▼ *Hidden Desire*, finished image



50 High Stakes Chess

Sometimes the right location and the right models all roll together at the right time. In this instance, I had the opportunity to work at the home of model Jean-Luc Hass. His family's home was a beautiful, perfectly maintained Victorian with a multitude of incredible antiques. Together with model Megan Camper we spent the entire day creating images largely inspired by the location. For whatever reason, something in the chemistry of the day led us toward a dark, collective vision.

High Stakes Chess began as the models relaxed after we'd concluded a series of images on the staircase behind them. They sat on a small settee immediately behind a finely carved chess set that was arranged on an antique chest. I propped a large silver reflector against a chair to my right and simply said, "Pose." I took no more than a

➤ *High Stakes Chess,* finished image

➤ The figure candelabra from an earlier project

➤ Alternative from the same session

handful of exposures to get the hero image, which was a rather unusual occurrence for me as a lifetime member of Over-Shooters Anonymous.

The image is lit by window light from behind and to camera left. A reflector to camera right provides just enough fill for a dramatic ratio along with the warmth of a little incandescent light in the hallway to the right. The image was captured entirely in camera with the only compositing being the figure candelabra borrowed from another image.

I am satisfied when I get one good image from a session and occasionally, I get nothing at all. Creativity is lightning in a bottle, and in a rare case only has it sparked all day long. We spent this entire day creating images that I continue to be happy with. Only a few are contained in this book, but I could have done nearly an entire book from the collection of images made this day alone.

51 Exile

This image was created far more simply than it appears while in the often borrowed studio of my friend Cindy Romano. With her granddaughter Gretchen as the model and the mask and wardrobe selected from Cindy's vast collection, I became aware of how nice it is to have good friends that share. Thank you, Cindy! All I did was bring my camera.

The primary image of Gretchen is photographed against a plain medium gray background. One of the reasons I use medium gray as a background is that textures will show well on the background in most blending modes and a layer mask can be used to reduce the texture without having to make a selection of the primary subject. The appearance of the texture can be manipulated by dodging, burning or adding color to the underlying gray background.

I began experimenting with textures that would enhance the sense of dark beauty I saw in this particular capture of the subject. I usually start by opening ten or twelve textures and experimenting with them individually or in combination with each other. In this case, one of the first few I tried was an art deco architectural detail from a folder with many unrelated textures. I don't know when or where it was taken but it suited the image perfectly. With a little repositioning and some slight adjustments with the Liquify filter, the image was complete! The texture shows very distinctly on the bright face of the model, in a subdued medium brightness on the background, and not at all on the subject's black hair and clothing. A layer mask was used to preserve details in the eyes. It's rare, at least for me, when an image comes together this easily and yet looks as though complex post-production techniques were applied.

◀ The art deco texture *(left)*

◀ Straight out of camera *(right)*

➤ *Exile*, finished image

52 Serious Moonlight

If you view this image carefully, you'll see many features that I've used in images presented earlier in this book. The most obvious of those is *Gravity's Consent (page 44)*, which has several common features deployed in a very similar way. Yet, the differing color palettes and poses give the two final images a very different look, just as a melody played in quick tempo has a very different emotional impact than the same melody played at a slower, more somber pace. Every color, form, and element we use in our images can evoke entirely different viewer responses. The differences come in the choices we make for each component of the images and how they impact the relationships they have to every other element of the image. In other words, context is everything. Just when we think that every image has been already been done and we're out of options, we find one more variation.

In this particular case I was entirely unaware of how similar *Serious Moonlight* was to *Gravity's Consent* until it was complete and I dropped it into a folder of images I was collecting for a slide show. Yet they are quite different. The direct, camera-aware gaze of *Gravity's Consent* contrasts with a private act of supplication in the image *Serious Moonlight*. The primary hues in each of the images are nearly exact complements of each other. Yet the moon, trees, birds and clouds are nearly identical in both compositions. Given any small combination of colors, subjects, forms, and compositional schemes, an almost infinite number of images are possible. Often, in both music and visual art, the maker will re-use and re-purpose many of the same motifs and concepts over and over, and yet achieve very different results in the finished works.

➤ Straight out of camera *(left)*

➤ An alternative postproduction treatment *(right)*

➤ *Serious Moonlight,* finished image *(facing page)*

53 The Fisherman's Daughter

The central figure of the image was composited from seven subjects with various selections of arms, legs, torsos and facial features. Had I clearly visualized the concept from the outset I might have achieved it with one model from one session, but as is often the case, the concept evolved over time. In the past, I have composited faces using lips, eyes, noses, and chins from various subjects, further modifying the components with the Liquify filter. In doing so I've stayed true to my personal rule of always using my own photographs as the underlying material in an image. Although the composite looks photographically real, it bears only partial resemblance to any of the models involved. Just in case, I have photo releases for all the models. The fish however, refused to sign.

This same ornamental wooden fish purchased from an import store has appeared in many of my images. Fish are a universal symbol that will resonate in many different ways depending on the particular viewer. Each of the arms and fish were placed to offer a certain modern sense of modesty to the subject. A number of Hindu goddesses are depicted with four arms including Vishnu, one of the three supreme deities of Hinduism.

The background for *Fisherman's Daughter* is a tree-lined river given several passes with the Reduce Noise filter at full strength, which eliminates fine detail and gives the background a painterly look. It had occurred to me several times to use the central subject on an entirely different background. I have often used some of the same images repeatedly as subordinate elements in a variety of finished pieces; so why shouldn't I try moving a central subject to a new environment *(see alternative image, bottom right)*?

➤ *The Fisherman's Daughter*, finished image *(facing page)*

➤ The background treatment

➤ Postproduction in progress

➤ An alternate image

54 Sisters of Mercy

V. Nixie is a wonderful alternative model, with a unique look and the ability to create unusual and wonderfully angular poses. But in this session, she presented a series of relatively straightforward full-length poses. I start many sessions with a series of three full-length poses inspired by Raphael's three graces. I have many such finished images that began with the same subject posed in three similar full-length poses, each with very different looks, but all with the initial inspiration of Raphael's graces.

A beautiful model to began with, for a year or more V. Nixie maintained her closely shaved head, creating an unusual visage. She was draped in a flowing light weight chiffon fabric, and I selected three poses from among several dozen similar poses and assembled them into a single image. I masked the arms in such a way as to be subtly ambiguous and overlapping. The draped fabric is partially transparent allowing a muted image of the subject's underlying figures. The subject's skin tone was brought to a desaturated pale blue, the complement of the gold behind her and with hints of pink in her lips and eyelids.

The radiating lines in the gold circles of the halos behind the subjects is an image of the underside of a mushroom cap. The underside created such a wonderful yet organic look, that I've used it in many diverse applications. Among my personal rules is that I must photograph everything that appears in my finished images. I don't use anyone else's stock photos and I don't use any rendering programs. Although the elements may be manipulated to extremes in Photoshop, they all began as photographs that I've taken myself.

➤ *Sisters of Mercy,* finished image *(facing page)*

➤ One of the original three captures

➤ The mushroom cap used for the halos *(middle and right)*

55 The Unbearable Lightness of Being

Occasionally, sources of inspiration seem to collide all at once and demand attention. The title is from a novel by Milan Kundera, a favorite which I had recently re-read. The lips are an homage to Man Ray's image familiarly known as *The Lips*.

I was at friend Sarah Johnston's studio photographing her daughter Katie, and as Katie stood up and stretched between poses, the entire image came into my mind's eye, just as it is seen in the final image. It was, for me, a rare occurrence in which the image was completed exactly as it was visualized, and I was completely aware of the specific inspirations. Rarely are the details of inspiration, process, and completion so obvious and accessible all at once. How easy

- The face that underlies the lips
- The lips from my personal image stock

it would be if that was always the case. I'd be far more prolific.

I asked Katie to assume a pose just as she had while stretching, and we tweaked the pose just a little for the capture. The lips were taken from an image I'd worked on in the past but never finished. Each pair of lips was on its own layer and then grouped. To the group a Soft Light blending mode was applied before the individual layers were arranged over a face with closed eyes that I chose from my personal image stock. The position of each pair of lips was adjusted to the features of the face. The lip layers were flattened and an inverted selection of the lips was used to delete the face, but I retained the features appearing within the boundaries of the lips. Finally, straight kite strings were drawn with a small hard white brush and a gentle curve was added to the strings using the Liquify filter.

➤ *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, finished image

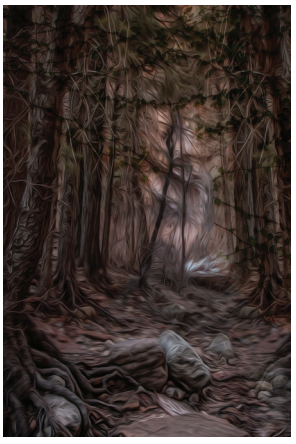
56 Wood Nymph

In this case, the seed of the concept was as simple as the hand and arm pose. The pose was stolen from Gustave Klimt's portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer. Theft, as we all know by now, is the source of many, possibly most, creative pursuits. The paradox is that we can steal an idea and yet end up with something unique. The idea is to steal it and make it our own. Admittedly, it is a narrow border between imitation and inspiration but we all know it when we see it. A recognizable motif from another artist's prior creation is often an homage, and is used openly and with great respect to the original creation.

As an homage to Gustav Klimt's hand pose, I photographed model Amelia on a plain gray background of one shade. Amelia stood in the nude with a long black flowing fabric wrapped around her. I asked her to hold the same pose through the first exposure. Then an assistant unwrapped the black fabric for a second exposure of the nude. The two exposures were brought into Photoshop with the clothed layer on top. The underlying layer was partially revealed using a layer mask to give the impression of a diaphanous fabric revealing the subject's figure.

The forest floor was created from several exposures, textures, and a composite layer by using the keyboard shortcut Shift+Alt+Command+E. This created a new flattened layer that was a combined version of the selected working layers that left the initial layers unchanged. It was finished with a High Pass filter. Both subject layers (clothed and nude) were selected and put on top of the background layer. The forest and nude figure is seen subtly though the transparent fabric, while the face and hands are kept completely opaque. Finally, the cardinal was added and the subject's lips were painted in a red sample from the cardinal.

➤ *Wood Nymph,* finished image



➤ The background treatment

➤ *Adele Bloch-Bauer,* by Gustav Klimt

➤ Straight out of camera

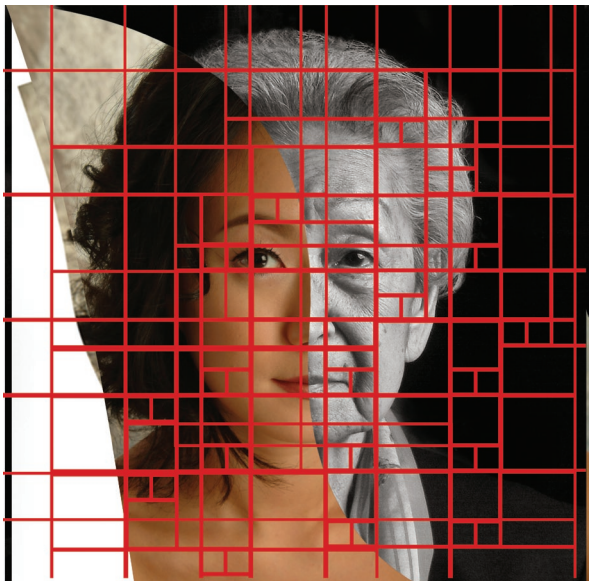
57 Time After Time

The image *Time after Time* began as a pre-wedding portrait of three generations of women, and evolved into the fine art portrait of a family's dying matriarch. In the bride's home, several months before her wedding, I met grandma Yamamoko, and I was captivated by her life story and by the charm, dignity, and depth of the wisdom so apparent in her face. We spoke at some length about her life, her family, her late husband, and her time in the relocation camps during the war. I'm honored to have met her.

Compositing the individual photographs into Photoshop, I paired the image of Mrs. Yamamoko with the features of several younger Asian women to give the image a sense of time, youth through old age. I made sure to keep some of Mrs. Yamamoko's features as photorealistic so that she would be clearly recognizably to her family and friends. The younger features on the right are stylized to add to the sense of a life's transition over time. Because she had spent portions of her life in both the East and the West, I incorporated a yin/yang curve bisecting the subject's face and a grid composed of various golden rectangles. The image was taken into Painter for the final treatment using broad strokes with a large palette knife.

Mrs. Yamamoko died early on her granddaughter's wedding day, a fact that was kept from the bride until late in the day. The bride and her grandmother were very close, and although greatly saddened by her

▲ Exposure of Mrs. Yamamoto



▲ Postproduction in progresss

▲ *Time After Time*, finished image

passing, the bride and her family perceive the events as having given symmetry to the arc of their family's history. Occasionally, as photographers and image makers, we are granted the very great privilege of contributing a small final document to the legacy and celebration of a human life.

58 Windswept

Windswept is another image inspired in large part by Death Valley. I think a sense of desolation and dry wind is evident. Model Cat Hedlund posed for the image in the studio with a medium softbox camera right and a strip light to the left and behind the subject metering. The color of the gold fabric was manipulated by painting on a blank layer in Color blending mode with a color sampled from the model's hair. The sky showing through the clouds is the slightly desaturated complementary color of the fabric and hair; saturation and higher local contrast bring attention to the central subject. The subject is photographed on a plain medium gray background and a fan provide the windswept look to the hair and fabric.

The background is from Death Valley with additional clouds added in several layers both above and behind the main subject layer. The cloud layers have been extensively masked into each other and into the fabric flowing from the subject to appear as though the fabric was becoming a part of the clouds and swirling in an implied arc around the sphere behind the subject. The sphere is created from one of my many kitchen textures by using a low opacity Bevel & Emboss layer style on a circle selected from the interior bottom of an enamel pot.

➤ *Windswept*, finished image

▲ Capture of the central figure

▲ Postproduction in progress

The location of the sphere is left ambiguous as to whether it is in front of or behind the clouds. Several additional texture layers are added on the top of the layer stack and selectively masked from the subject's skin and features. A composite layer (Shift+Option+Command+E) was added on top, and a duplicate composite layer was converted to black & white, given a slight Gaussian Blur filter, and put in Overlay blending mode.

59 Side Show

My image *Side Show* is a very direct and obvious appropriation of Seurat's *The Side Show*. Sometimes we just have to have some fun. Not all of our images have to be serious and ambitious hallmarks of our personal style. This one is just a fun tribute to the beautiful and well known burlesque performer Eva Wolfe (Eva Strangelove). Eva modeled for a workshop I was teaching near her home in Austin, Texas. When I'm teaching in a workshop environment I don't always do my best work, as I pay attention to students rather than fully developing a collaborative session with a model. Nevertheless, I had quite a few cute, spontaneous and burlesque-like images from Eva, and I wanted to use as many as I could. Recreations of famous paintings, from the *Mona Lisa* to the *Girl with the Pearl Earring,* have become increasingly common. I thought Seurat's *The Side Show* was the perfect vehicle for Eva's images.

I started with a copy of the *The Side Show* as a background layer and template. A number of Eva's images were selected and placed in the same positions as the performers in Seurat's painting. The crowd at the bottom is a composite of images of a number of photographer friends. Although the original is used as a template, everything in my image was created for the image including the light fixtures, tree, banister, interior architecture and poster images. The pointillism for which Seurat is noted was recreated in the background with the addition of the Add Noise filter in Photoshop, but the images of Eva were masked to retain a photo-realistic image.

Although the image is not meant to be taken seriously, studying and imitating classic artists is not a frivolous activity and provides a far greater appreciation of an image than just a casual viewing.

- The reconstructed imitation of the Seurat background *(left)*
- One of the many subject captures were selected out *(right)*

Side Show, finished image

Symbol Tree

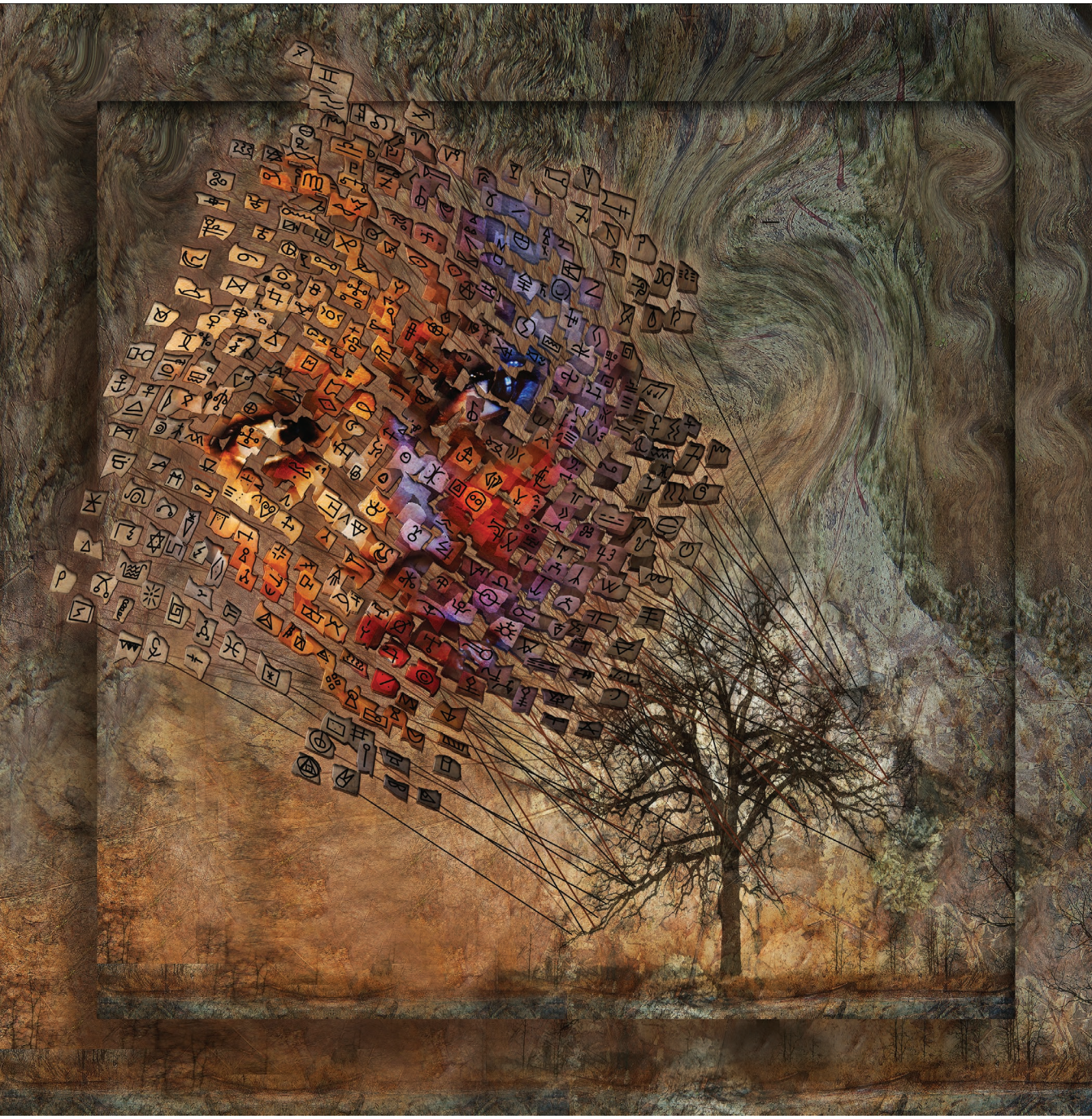
The source of an idea and visual concept is a question frequently asked of visual artists. I am often asked if my ideas are pre-visualized or occur spontaneously during the development of an image in Photoshop. About a third of my images are pre-visualized, about a third are begun with a specific pre-visualization that evolves during post-production, and about a third are the result of just fooling around on the computer until I see something I like. I don't think there is a right way; I only think that there is *your* way in a personal process that evolves for each individual image maker.

The image *Symbol Tree* was derived from a very specific image seen in a dream. Some of my best ideas have come from the dreams that come very early in the morning shortly before waking up, a stage known as hypnopompic sleep. Visual images spontaneously occur and have a strong emotional component. At this stage of sleep we can have some some ability to guide and direct our visualization.

The background layer was of a leafless oak tree with several textures applied over the background. The tiles (or leaves) were created from hand-drawn selections of the background with an Bevel & Emboss layer style added and the individual symbols hand-drawn on each tile. Hundreds of tile layers were created and put into a group. The tile group was brought over the top of the face in the Soft Light layer blending mode, and the layers were moved to find just the right alignment. The face layer of model Naimawas activated and an inverse selection of the tile layer used to remove that face layer that fell outside the bounds of the tiles. Finally, strings were drawn with a fine brush connecting the tiles to branches of the tree.

▲ The original tree for the background

◀ Photograph of model Naima



▲ *Symbol Tree*, finished image

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